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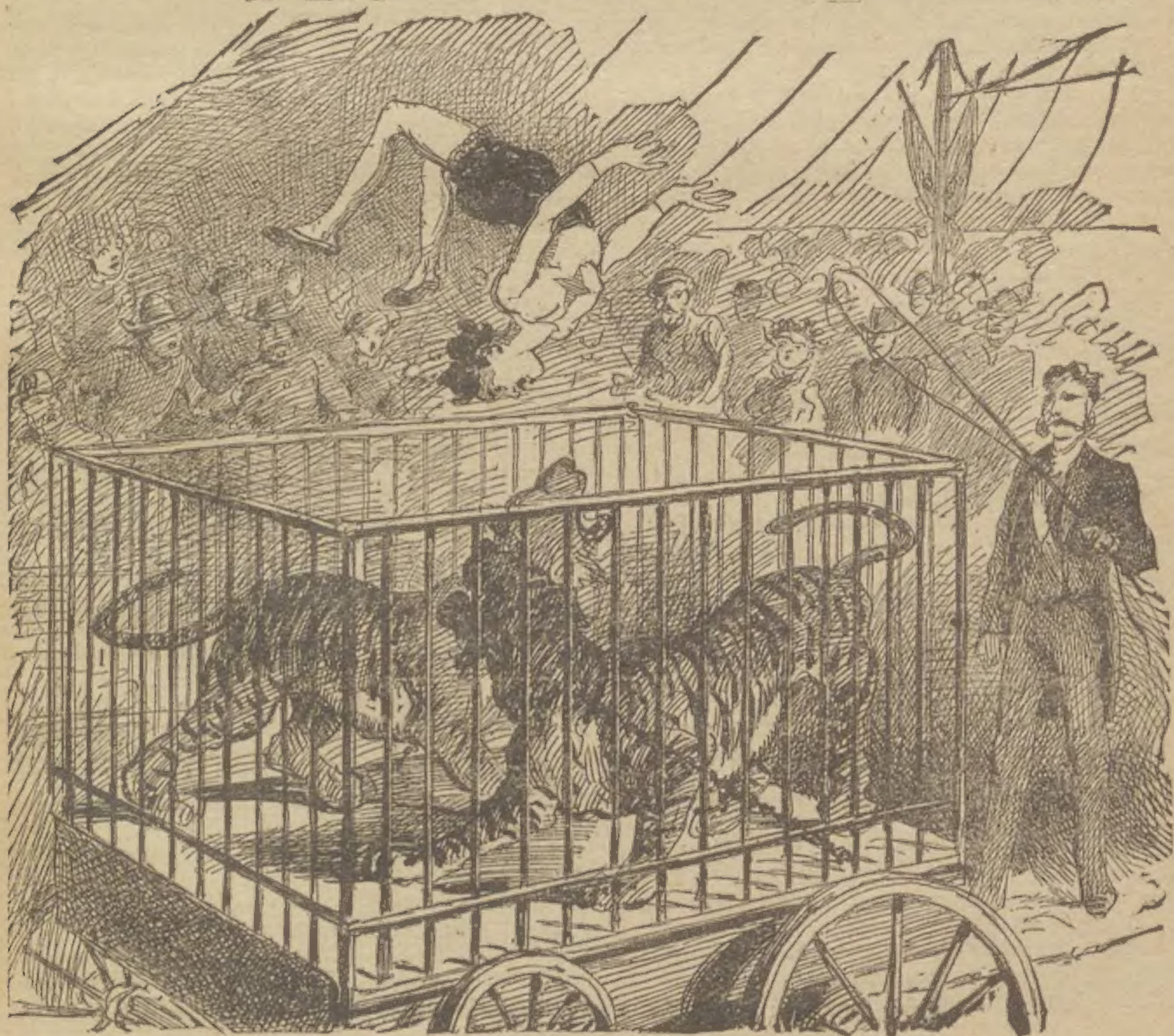
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Vol. XXXL

JAKE. the Colorado Circus Boy.

BY BRYANT BAINBRIDGE.



HE SAW, AT FIRST GLANCE THAT HE MUST FALL SHORT AND DIRECTLY INTO THE TIGER'S CAGE,

Jumping Jake,

The Colorado Circus Boy;

OR,

The Wicked Man of Slashaway Bar.

BY BRYANT BAINBRIDGE.

CHAPTER I.

A VILLAINOUS SCHEME.

SLASHAWAY BAR was in a state of considerable excitement, and it was quite natural it should be. From the time the town was organized, two years before, the only amusements had been playing cards, drinking Tim Ryan's beverages at some other man's expense and fighting road-agents.

At last, however, the evil spell was broken and Slashaway Bar was about to plunge headlong into gayety of a dazzling and fashionable nature. Such, at least, was the opinion of the citizens who read the announcement that "Strong, Smith & Drinkwater's Combined European, African, and American Mastodon Circus and Menagerie" was to exhibit for a limited time in the "Queen City of Colorado."

The Barites had never thought of claiming this last title before, but it was unanimously voted that it fitted and should be adopted.

More than this, it seemed that all were going to see the "show," and as the miners read the posters they were observed to have in nearly every case a package under their arms, which contained newly-purchased finery, designed expressly for the occasion.

Among those who read these posters was a tall man in a long black coat. He was a stranger, and the sour face with which he looked at the bills finally led one bluff miner to slap him on the back and inquire if he expected any of his family to go over the divide.

The inquiry aroused the tall man who at once hurried away, and paused no more until he reached Ryan's "Royal Hotel." Entering, he looked around the bar-room and then went to Tim, who stood behind the bar.

"Is Mr. Hendrix in?" he blandly inquired.

"He is that, sor; he's roight up in his room," Tim hastened to say, anxious to please; for Hendrix was the advance-agent of the long-named circus, and it followed that whoever inquired for him must likewise be a great man.

So Timothy called a Chinaman who escorted the tall man up-stairs, and left him before a certain door. The tall man rapped, was directed to "Come in!" by an unseen person, and then entered.

He stood face to face with a small, active, dark-complexioned man who was plainly of French blood. This was Hendrix. He sprung up at sight of the tall man and put out his hand.

"My dear Chapman, I am delighted to see you; I am full of enthusiasm!"

And he shook his visitor's hand in his delight until Mr. Chapman forcibly rescued it.

"I don't doubt it," he tartly said. "Of course

you're glad to see the man who is filling your pockets along regular. But of that we will say nothing. Sit down!"

Mr. Chapman spoke in an impatient, irritable way. He had taken a chair himself, but the Frenchman was dancing about in a spasm of politeness which was thrown away. He obeyed the last terse order and then sat smiling blandly.

"Drinkwater received my note, I suppose?" the tall man continued.

Hendrix's face instantly fell.

"He did, sir."

"And you have made arrangements for doing as I said?"

"We have, sir, but—"

"There are no 'buts' in the case. I know what you would say; that the boy is useful to you and you ought to be remunerated further. You have him billed as 'Jacopo Campani, the Unrivalled Acrobat.' Bah! this is for me; you take me for a silly fish and expect to bleed me. It won't work. Jake Morrill, or Jacopo Campani, he is mine to do with as I wish, and I shall exercise my right. I want you and Drinkwater to understand that!"

Hendrix had been trying in various ways to interrupt this flow of sarcastic talk; but the tall man kept on serenely to the end.

When he had said his say, he gave Hendrix a chance.

"My dear Mr. Chapman, far be it from me to take part in such a trick as you mention. I, for one, ask for no more money for Jacob. You have already paid us royally. But one word about the boy. I claim he is all we advertise. As an acrobat he has few equals in America; he would be in demand with the best circuses in the country if his worth was known. When we bill him as 'Jacopo Campani,' it is, of course, a trick of the trade. He is not an Italian, but an American. He is doing wonders in his profession, however; his vaulting is something superb. If you doubt it, see for yourself. Among the circus people, with whom he is a favorite, he is familiarly known as 'Jumping Jake,' or 'Jake the Jumper.'"

"I am glad to see you out of breath," tartly answered Chapman. "Yet, take a fresh start and go again. You want the boy to live. Tell me why."

"There's money in him," Hendrix whispered.

"For you."

"Ay, and for whoever can use him. Such jumping as he can do is marvelous and a mine of wealth."

"Are you in earnest?" Chapman keenly demanded.

"I am—I swear it!"

"Well, it's a pity your profession should lose such a shining light, but so it must be. Jake, the Jumper, must die!"

The Frenchman's face fell and he sighed audibly.

"Is your heart weakening?" Chapman angrily asked.

Hendrix snapped his fingers.

"Bah! you should know me better—"

"I do. Enough! Well, I told you to have a plan laid by which Jake should be forever put out of sight while in this town, and a plan so

cunning that no human being would surmise his death was the result of anything more than an accident."

"*Mon Dieu!* have I failed? No; all is arranged. Jumping Jake dies, as you have said!"

"What is the plan?"

"I will tell you. One of the feats our young acrobat performs is to take a run along a spring board, and then turn a double somersault over an open cage of untamed and hungry tigers. He does this neatly and coolly, and has never failed to succeed. When I say an open cage, I mean that, while it has firm sides, after the usual kind, we take off the top before Jake jumps, and a failure on his part would drop him into the midst of the tigers."

"Bah! they are old, toothless and lazy. You circus men are full of tricks."

"I give you my word of honor that they are young, untamed, savage and hungry. No keeper dares enter their cage. And while the boy is vaulting they are tearing at their bars and roaring like demons."

Chapman's eyes sparkled. He believed and began to see the fiendish plan of his confederate.

"And the idea—" he began.

"Is to substitute a weak, decayed spring-board for the right one, so that when Jake jumps the board will break, and he will fall short—fall into the tigers' den!"

Hendrix unfolded this terrible scheme with a bland smile on his face, and Chapman leaned forward and took his hand. It was something unexpected from him, but he was delighted with the plan, and said as much.

"Make a success of this, and I will give you and old Drinkwater five hundred dollars to divide between you," he then added.

This time it was the Frenchman's turn to be delighted, and the pair of villains wound themselves up in the best of spirits, and ended by sending for liquor with which to drink to the success of their plan.

It may have been a judgment that the liquor was as vile as was their scheme.

Shortly before dark the "European, African and American Circus," arrived in town. They came with a grand flourish, preceded by a band-wagon discoursing thrilling music under the combined uproar of a base-drum, a snare-drum and three brass instruments which were more remarkable for quantity than quality.

Then came the cages containing the wild beasts, all of which were fast closed because the animals were so ferocious. At least, such was the reason given, but Hendrix whispered to Chapman that half the cages were empty.

"Look at our wonders," continued the Frenchman. "There's Hebe, the Fat Woman, who weighs four hundred and thirty-five pounds; Mr. Rush, the living skeleton, who weighs but sixty-one; Yusef, the tattooed man; Hamed, the tiger-tamer— Hal and there comes Jake, the Jumper! Watch him!"

Riding on a large, black horse was a youth of about seventeen, or eighteen years, dressed in a suit of black and red, with silver trimmings—Jumping Jake!

He was a bright-faced, keen-eyed youth, with a splendid form and head, the latter covered with rings of black hair; and as the procession passed he held nine pairs of eyes out of every ten.

Without leaving his horse he turned somersaults in the air until the people were wild with delight. Hard-working men were they at Slashaway Bar, wielding the pick and cradle to induce the yellow gold to leave its bed, but they vowed, one and all, that they would "pony up ther dust ter see that youngster in ther ring ef it bu'sted them all ter smash."

And when Slashaway Bar said a thing, it meant it.

A long, slab building at one side of the town, which was being erected for a combined saloon and dance-hall, had been hired by Strong, Smith & Drinkwater, and to that point went the procession.

Once there, Jake, the Jumper, leaped from his horse and ran in.

"I say," said the tiger-tamer, catching him by the arm, "s'pose we go out on a t'ar ter-night."

"No," answered Jake, decisively. "I have one evening of rest ahead of me and I shall make the most of it. Take Yusef and go on on your tear, if your mind wanders that way, and may you come in with a whole head!"

CHAPTER II.

THE JUMPER CHANGES HIS MIND.

JUMPING JAKE went directly to the men's dressing-room and proceeded to put off his professional garments for a more sober suit. His calling had a sort of fascination for him, but he was beginning to think, as he grew older, that a man should have a more earnest ambition than to be looked at by the multitude as a curiosity and his gaudy dress at times annoyed him.

He had cast himself down on a rude bed to rest when the Living Skeleton entered the room. The latter came noisily, and was so evidently in a passion that Jake had to take notice of him.

"What's the matter, L. S.?"

"L. S.," we will explain, was the abbreviated name by which the thin man was known among his comrades.

"One of those loafers outside run into me violently, and when I remonstrated, winked at his backers and said he didn't see me. Always hitting at my thinness, you see. But there would have been bloodshed if the Tattooed Man had not held me back. I'd have knocked the tough through the wall; I would, by St. Jago!"

The Living Skeleton flourished his bony fist and looked as fierce as a Malay pirate, but Jake was used to that. L. S. was always ready to fight, his warlike ardor causing him to forget that he could scarcely have whipped a ten-year-old boy.

He was still prancing around when the Fat Woman entered, accompanied by a small boy. The latter was a keen-eyed young fellow, and a stranger to Jake.

"This hyar is the which," said the Fat Woman, with a beaming smile, pointing to the

Jumper, and the small boy made a deep and admiring bow.

"Hopin' you'll excuse ther intrusion, I'm yer obedient sarvint an' I've got suthin' fur you. Hyar she be."

And the small boy held a note toward the Jumper.

A sarcastic smile curled the the Jumper's lips. Notes were his daily food; notes in feminine writing; notes from girls who, in these wild Western towns, had been captivated by Jacopo Campani's grace.

This particular note read as follows:

"MR. CAMPANI:—I trust you will not misconstrue my motive in writing to you. As a stranger I should remain unseen and unheard had not circumstances brought to my notice something you ought to know. *Your life depends on it!* This I cannot write, nor can I come to you. If you will accompany the bearer I will be glad to tell you all and defeat a wicked plot. Excuse my boldness, if such it is, and do not neglect the warning of
A FRIEND."

Jacopo Campani read to the end in silence. As he had expected the writing was plainly that of a girl, but it was not the kind of a note he was accustomed to receive. Unless there was a pretense to what did not exist, in fact, it was something out of the ordinary line.

The Jumper looked at the small boy. He had a keen, shrewd face, but it was an honest and prepossessing one.

"What's your name?" Jake asked.

"Jim Bangs, commonly called Weasel Jim," the small boy replied.

"Who gave you this note?"

"That's a secret only to be told when ye see ther sender. Proodence demands secrecism," was the clear reply.

"Well, I believe I'll change my mind and go out. I have a little business to attend to anyhow."

"Let me go with you; you may have trouble from the toughs," eagerly said the warlike Living Skeleton.

But the Jumper kindly declined to take a partner, and with Weasel Jim as a leader left the shanty. Jake knew very little about the reputation of Slashaway Bar, but as few Western towns are strictly perfect, he went with a pair of revolvers in his pockets.

As he had been seen at the Bar only in his professional dress, and it was a place where people came and went, it was not likely he would be recognized.

"Now, then," he said to the small boy, when they were fairly clear of the shanty, "I want more light on this subject. I don't hanker to run my head against a stone wall."

"Guv'nor, I'd like ter tell ther secret, but I won't break my promise. She's ther charmin'-est gal at ther Bar, an' I won't go back on her nobow. That's said an' it lays."

"Well, heave ahead, but if there's a drop-game tacked on anywhere I shall forget that bullets hurt and blaze away."

Weasel Jim asserted that he was "square from the ground up," and the pair went on. It wasn't far to go; a man could have run around the whole village in ten minutes, and the guide finally paused at the door of a cabin and gave a peculiar knock.

The Jumper loosened a revolver, but when the door opened his hand fell. If the girl thus revealed was a decoy of scoundrels, then Jake's eyes were not fit for reading character. She looked more like an angel, he thought, than anything else, and as we must all admit that a pretty girl pleases the eye, let us pardon Jumping Jake's wild fancy. Pretty she surely was, and her face was that of a reliable girl too.

Her face brightened at sight of the Jumper and she stepped back and bade them enter. The small boy motioned to Jake to go first, and when he obeyed the door closed and he saw Jim had not entered; he was alone with the pretty girl.

She seemed a little embarrassed, but she at once addressed him.

"I need scarcely ask if your name is Jacopo Campani, or if you received my note, she said.

"Because the reply would in each case be 'Yes,'" he said, smiling.

"Then I beg that you will sit down and let me explain what must seem to you a very strange matter," she continued.

"But not at all disagreeable," added he, with the gallantry of his eighteen years.

"It may prove so before the end," the girl said, with a perceptible shiver.

By that time they were sitting opposite each other at a small table and she rapidly continued:

"As there is no time to lose I will say that my name is Idalah Arnold. My father is a miner of this town. We are not rich; our surroundings prove that; and every day for the last year it has been my custom to go to the Royal Hotel and attend to the accounts of the proprietor, Mr. Ryan. He does a good deal of business, not only as a hotel-keeper, but in furnishing articles for the miners. But that is not to the point. To-day, while there, I heard something of interest to you."

"I can't imagine what it was," said Jake, not a little puzzled.

"Do you know a man named Hendrix?"

"Yes; he's our advance-agent."

"And a Mr. Chapman?"

"No. I never heard of him."

"Yet, he knows you, and, with Hendrix, he held a long talk about you to-day."

"Well, I shall be pleased to know what they said."

"I hardly think it will please you, but you shall hear."

And then Idalah proceeded to tell of the interview recorded in our opening chapter. Her room, as book-keeper, had adjoined that where the plot was formed, and as they had talked loudly, all had plainly reached her; and when she gained the clew to their words she had not scrupled to listen further.

Jumping Jake did indeed hear with interest, but, beyond a compression of his lips, his face did not change.

"A very fine scheme!" he commented. "So they intend to drop me among the tigers and have me eaten up. Rather a scaly plot, but I can't say anything villainous from old Hendrix would surprise me. But, this Chapman—I never heard of him. What the dickens has he got against me?"

"You must be in his way, somehow."

"Can he want to be vaulter and acrobat in S., S. & D.'s show?" Jake asked, with a grimace. "Scarcely, and that's the only way in which I could cast a shadow in his path. I am neither rich, a prince in disguise nor a candidate for the Legislature."

"He wishes you dead, anyhow."

"He can take it out in wishing. I'm not ready to leave this world, just yet, and I won't leave it at his say—so, Brother Chapman will get left in this matter."

"Then you will run away?"

"Run? Not a bit of it, Miss Arnold; that isn't my way. I'll stay and fight it out, and I'll bet they don't get a man in my king-row!"

"But, just think," argued Miss Idalah, with evident uneasiness, "that both Hendrix and Drinkwater are against you."

"Very true, but I am not afraid of them. I mean to put wit against wit, while if it comes to a personal collision, all the boys of the circus will be with me. The Tiger-Tamer, Tattooed Man, Living Skeleton and Fat Woman are all my friends, and the first two are giants in point of strength."

It was plain Idalah did not feel at ease, and would much rather have seen Jake save himself by flight, but she was only seventeen years old and felt that he might resent her advice.

She felt called upon to tell why he had been invited to the cabin.

"My father gave me strict orders not to go out, and I would not have dared go alone, anyway. It was lucky he was out, or I should have been obliged to warn you by note, and I feared you would regard such a way as a joke."

Even as she spoke a rough voice sounded outside the cabin and she sprung hurriedly to her feet.

"It is my father," she said, "and he must not find you here! Oh! what shall I do?"

Her alarm was so deep and sincere that Jake remained speechless. He could not see why the return of Mr. Arnold should cause his daughter such a panic, but the fact remained that she was most decidedly frightened.

CHAPTER III.

A CAT IN THE CLOSET.

IDALAH'S loss of courage was but momentary and she flung open a door near her.

"The closet!" she exclaimed. "Get inside there quickly!"

Jumping Jake saw a place he did not aspire to occupy, but as the latch rattled he saw he had no time for words or examination. One quick rush he made, and then the door closed behind him and he was in total darkness except for a bar of light which struggled through a crack and was like a yellow thread on a black robe.

The young acrobat lost no time in turning about so as to use this crack as a means of observation.

The outer door had opened and two men were in the room he had just left. One of them was of middle age, with a powerful form, a huge head and a coarse, brutal-looking face.

His companion seemed about twenty years of age and looked more like a dissipated city youth

than a Western man. He wore eye-glasses and sported a small, straw-colored mustache, but his form looked as muscular as the average and his manner was certainly confident enough.

Further than this Jake had not had time to see when the elder man addressed Idalah.

"Hello, you!" he roughly said, "what're you hangin' around hyar fur? Why don't ye speak ter Claude Ritter an' not stand like a post?"

His questions did not dove-tail together well, but the girl seemed accustomed to his roughness and bowed, though coldly, to the dissipated-looking young man.

"Glad to see you, Princess," observed Ritter, with a smile which did not improve his looks. "You're as fresh and blooming as a peony."

"Why don't ye answer?" snapped the elder man, as Idalah deigned no reply. "Tell him he does ye proud an' thank him right hearty. Show yer bringin' up, will ye? Ritter, you are a fool if you marry a woman; but never mind. Gal, we've got business to speak on. Chuck on yer head-kiver an' waltz over ter Granny Miller's fer an hour or so."

Jumping Jake plainly saw that this big brute was Idalah's father, and he felt a strong desire to walk out and cuff him for his ruffianly ways. He saw plainly why the girl did not want Arnold to know of her guest, and another thing was now clear.

Idalah was anxious concerning the man in the closet.

She looked toward the latter place and hesitated, but another outburst from her father showed her there was no help for it. She must go, leaving the boy acrobat in the closet and to whatever fate had in store for him.

Her face expressed her uneasiness as she put on her hat and prepared to go. She went, and the two men were alone. Arnold flung himself in a chair.

"Set down, Ritter, set down," he said. "We've got rid o' that female property an' kin talk. Hang ther women; I never breathe free when they're around."

"I wonder you ever married," said Ritter.

"Hallo! what's that ter you? Ain't I hed time enough ter repent sence I tied ter ther gal's mother? Rather!"

"Tom Arnold, you're an honest man, but you have no taste for what's cute and nice," said his friend, putting his feet on the table.

"Taste fur thunder! But never mind, you kin now free yer mind."

"One thing first; when am I to marry Idalah?"

"Whenever you like."

"But she hangs off like a contrary mule."

"All women do."

"But I rely on you, Tom, to bring her to her senses. Marry her I will if it tears Slashaway Bar in pieces. You, Tom, must persuade her."

"Persuade your grandfather! Bring around your parson, an' I'll see ter ther rest. Ef ther gal is offish I'll—"

Tom Arnold finished the sentence by a significant working of his fingers around his own throat.

"Don't be a fool," said Ritter, bluntly. "You ought to know that game won't work at the Bar. Persuade or scare her into saying 'Yes'

without a murmur and all's well, but the parson won't officiate at any forced marriage."

Arnold meditated for a moment and then added:

"I reckon you are right, an' I'll take ther gal in hand. Ef you want ter marry her, marry her you shall. That is sworn to. You hear me?"

Ritter acknowledged that he heard, and then the compact was cemented by a drink from a black bottle.

Jake, the Jumper, watched them from his hiding-place with increasing disgust. A more pronounced ruffian than Tom Arnold seemed to be he had never seen, and all his indignation was aroused. Just then he wished he was Idalah's brother that he might champion her cause, but it was not certain he would not have to fight Tom in his own behalf.

As for Ritter, he was evidently a fit companion.

How the young acrobat was to get out of the closet he did not know. His time was his own for the night, but he did not care to pass it there. The closet did not admit of any material change of position, being barely wide enough for him to stand erect.

"I'm afraid I am in a bad fix," he thought. "If I am discovered I shall be arrested for a burglar, and for Idalah to testify in my behalf would be to expose her to her brutal father's anger. And it'll be a miracle if Arnold don't want something and come here to get it."

The other men had abandoned business for the time while paying homage to the black bottle, but Tom finally aroused, locked up the bottle and abruptly said:

"Well what about our business?"

"We're going to have the dust."

"Sart'in we be. Who said we wa'n't?"

"In a few days," continued Ritter, "Savage & Morgan will send off their gains. The quarterly wash is finished and I hear the mine has paid better than ever before. The team will take it over the mountain."

"And we'll drop on it on ther way," added Arnold.

"No; I have a better plan. When it goes, it will be well guarded, for Savage & Morgan fear road-agents. I have said the team will take it over the mountain, but it will not."

"No?"

"No. Previous to removing it, the firm will store it in the usual place. Good! we make a note of this fact and save them the trouble of transportation by taking it ourself."

Jake, watching the plotters, saw that Arnold cordially admired this plan, but there was doubt on his face.

"Can it be did?" he asked.

"It can, for I have bribed their watchman. You know they have but one—Big Bill Benner—and with him as a partner, to unlock the gates, we scoop in the fortune and jump from poverty to riches. How does it strike you?"

Arnold took his companion's hand.

"Ritter, you're a brick," he tersely commented.

"I hope I am," the younger villain modestly said, "and I can swear I take to this kind of work. I never slipped up on a job but once. That was

in New York—and my first. It made me an outcast from the East, but I've got some brains in my head since then."

The men continued their conversation, speaking wholly on details, while Jumping Jake began to think he had run against a good-sized norther by coming to Slashaway Bar. The plot to murder him; the scheme for marrying Idalah against her will; the proposed robbery—all combined made quite a ripple in the young acrobat's life. What would come of it he was not yet in a position to know.

Already he was growing tired of keeping in one position, and there was no certainty that Arnold would leave the cabin that night. What was to be done?

Anxious to do something, he turned to investigate the wall behind him, to see if there was really no hope there, and in so doing his head struck against some hard article which immediately fell to the floor with a startling clatter.

Jake's hair almost stood on end.

"Thunderation!" stormed Arnold, "ef that cat ain't in ther closet. It's Granny Miller's, an' I hate it like sin. Now, I've got it in my grip, as'twere, an' I'm blamed ef it leaves ther shanty alive."

The fellow arose, took two long strides and laid hold of the closet. He gave a jerk, but it did not open. Jake, more troubled than if he had been Granny Miller's cat in reality, was holding fast to the inside.

He wished to avert discovery, but if it must come he had his plans laid.

"Durn ther door!" roared Arnold, and then he gave another jerk which was more successful.

The door flew open, and that, too, with a suddenness which destroyed Arnold's balance and left him sprawling on the floor.

Then the "cat" appeared.

Out shot the Jumper with the marvelous agility which had given him a wide reputation, and with an accurate calculation he drove one foot into Mr. Arnold's stomach.

Nor was this all.

Arising from him as though he had been a spring-board, the young acrobat turned a somersault in the air, and, shooting over the table, encountered Ritter.

That person had seen him coming, as through a glass, darkly, but whether he was a cat, a man, or a blizzard, Ritter could not tell, so rapidly did Jake move. But as the latter came down his feet struck Ritter full in the face, and down he went to keep Arnold company.

One more leap took the acrobat to the door, and as he shot through there was nothing left to tell his victims what sort of an epidemic had prostrated them.

For Jake, mindful of the fact that delay was dangerous, made his way back to the circus-shanty just in time to decide a disputed point in a game of poker being played by the Living Skeleton and the Tattooed Man.

CHAPTER IV.

JUMPING JAKE COUNTERPLOTS.

ONCE in his own quarters the young acrobat had a chance to think calmly, and such thought was certainly needed. He had three important subjects for meditation, but strangely or other-

wise, he thought first of Idalah and the danger which menaced her from being forced into a disagreeable marriage by her father.

Jake's sympathies were all with the girl, and his anger arose to a white heat as he thought of her peril. It was certainly a shame that one so ladylike, refined and gentle should be misused. Jake, thereupon, registered a resolution to help her, as the solution of question third would probably enable him to do.

Question second was in regard to the contemplated robbery of Savage & Morgan. How could it be prevented? Clearly by warning the firm; that was simple.

Question third referred more closely to the Jumper himself. Granting that Idalah had made no mistake, and that Advance-agent Hendrix had plotted with a stranger to kill him (Jake), two questions arose: Why did they wish him dead, and who was the mysterious stranger—Chapman?

He devoted considerable time to studying this mystery, but it was a loss of labor. He had no idea who Chapman was, and could not see why the man should wish him dead.

Naturally, Idalah had not been able to remember all she overheard, but she remembered that the two plotters had spoken of money previously paid Hendrix and Drinkwater by Chapman, and it seemed it was no new spite he held against "Jacopo Campani."

"It may be I am a lost prince, or the heir of a cool million," thought the youth grimly, "but I'll be shot if I believe it. Stay; this Chapman must be at the Royal Hotel; why not amble over there, and try to get a look at him?"

The idea, once formed, grew upon him, and he made still another change in his toilet—one calculated to sink his identity as the "cat in the closet"—and again left the circus-grounds.

It was not far to the hotel, and when he saw that the bar-room was well filled, he coolly sauntered in. Every one was busily talking, the chief topic being the coming of the circus, and Jake was not made a target for curious eyes.

The place does not require a description here, being of the usual kind, while the people were the rough, free-and-easy and untamed children of nature common to the land of gold.

For the first time, Jake began to see that he might not so easily find Chapman. He did not want to inquire, and as Idalah had not seen the man, the youth did not know how he looked.

With this matter under consideration, Jake was standing at one side when a tall, well-dressed man entered the room. Jake noticed him at the first, chiefly because he had a very supercilious way of pushing through the crowd. Evidently he believed his good clothes made him a man superior to the others.

At the bar, however, he paused.

"Ryan," he said, "I want a bottle of whisky, some hot water and sugar carried to my room. I do not care to drink here."

He looked disdainfully at the common people, but Ryan was all blandness and politeness.

"Certainly, Misther Chapman; it shall be done. Oi will attend to it at wance."

The tall man went on, but Jumping Jake had

made a discovery; he had seen Chapman, his mysterious foe. And the man was a stranger to him. Possessing a faculty for remembering faces, he knew he had never known Chapman; if he had ever seen him before it must have been in his infancy or only casually.

Why, then, did the man hate him so bitterly?

"The idea grows on me that I am a prince in disguise," the youth grimly thought. "Jacopo Campani, keep your eyes open and you may yet be sitting on the throne of the Napoleons!"

Finding nothing else of importance on his hands he looked curiously about the room. He saw but one familiar face; the Tiger-Tamer was seated at a table playing poker with the gentleness of a lamb.

Jake was about to go to him when two persons pushed past him roughly. He looked and saw Tom Arnold and young Ritter. Both seemed in an ugly mood, and they went straight to the bar.

"Give me a pint o' melted lead," said Arnold, brusquely. "I've got a pain hyar what's needful o' help."

He laid his hands on his stomach where Jumping Jake's heels had struck, and Ritter caressed his nose in a mournful way. Jake smiled but kept his peace.

Arnold drank and then turned his face toward the crowd. There was an ugly look thereon, and the sequel proved that it did not belie his temper. Moving suddenly forward he paused beside the Tiger-Tamer.

"I've been licked onc't ter-night," he announced, "but I'll sw'ar ther man don't eat beef that kin do it ag'in. Do ye take it up, my bantam?"

He slapped the Tiger-Tamer on the shoulder, but Hamed, turning a little, looked at him from head to foot with unwavering calmness.

"I don't see nothin' ter take up," he replied.

Arnold caught the double meaning and a fresh fury shot to his face. With a quick and skillful movement he caught Hamed's chair and jerked it from beneath him, and Hamed only escaped a fall by a quick leap.

He turned about calmly, but Jake, who knew his great power, was not to be deceived.

"Whar I hail from," said the circus-man, quietly, "such things ain't rulable. Ef Slash-away Bar says 'tis ther fashion hyar, all right; otherwise, this party must set down whar he meant me ter set—on ther floor!"

"You ain't got ther means o' puttin' me thar," Arnold declared, determined to have a fight. "No calf kin bleat out loud at ther Bar."

"Ther Bar shall vote," said Hamed. "Which is it, men—was ther act squar' or not?"

"Not squar', an' you're a fool ef you swaller it," some one answered; and there was a general echoing of the verdict.

"So I thought," Hamed evenly said. "Critter, set down!"

He pointed to the floor which, having been occupied all the evening by smokers and drinkers was certainly not in a condition to make a good seat, and Tom Arnold declared with a profane addition that he would do nothing of the kind.

"If you mean fight, sail in; otherwise, cave," he said, with a swagger.

"Ther Bar has voted; you heerd it; but ef you ain't satisfied, we'll change. Ther ayes had it; now, ther nose has it!"

As Hamed spoke he thrust out his hand, caught Tom's nose between his thumb and finger and gave it a twist which whirled its owner around sideways.

Arnold righted himself as soon as possible and rushed at his man, but he was shown a sample of the Tiger-Tamer's power not to be despised.

Hamed caught him skillfully and in a resistless hold. One moment the two were mixed in a hard grapple, and then down on the floor sat Tom Arnold with a force which made the glasses jingle on the bar.

It was a bitter discomfiture, for jeers arose from the crowd and Arnold was compared to a map, but he was not allowed to rise just then. When he tried it Hamed tipped him over and planted his foot on his breast.

"I'm not a fighting man," said the Tiger-Tamer, "and exercise o' this kind may be carried ter excess. Better lay whare you be."

He had done everything easily, but what he had done was astonishing. Men at the Bar knew Tom Arnold, and they realized what it was to thus put him down.

The ruffian squirmed under the hostile heel only to labor in vain, but the scene suddenly assumed a new aspect. Jumping Jake saw Ritter draw a knife and, partially concealing it in his coat-sleeve, work around to the Tiger-Tamer's back.

His movement was not to be mistaken; if he did not intend to commit outright murder there was lawless work planned by his unscrupulous brain.

He had nearly reached his man when his way was barred by Jumping Jake.

"Hustle out of this!" the young ruffian ordered, not recognizing his previous assailant.

"I'm not a hustler," Jake coolly said, keeping his place.

Ritter drew back his arm and shot out a vicious blow, but Jake easily dodged it.

"Stand back!" he cried, "or I'll return your compliment in kind. Assassins don't deserve too much clemency."

"Who's an assassin?" Ritter surlily demanded, checked for a moment.

"You intended to be one."

"Take care; that's a serious charge."

"I can prove it. What have you up your sleeve? Drop the knife!"

"You're a liar if you say I carry one. Boys, you know me in the Bar; do you take me for a cut-throat?"

It was plain from Ritter's manner that he was losing his ambition for a fight. He had neither the muscle nor the brute courage of Arnold, and the bold stand of his younger opponent had alarmed him not a little. As a result, he looked to the Bar to back him.

There he met with disappointment.

"We take you for a cut-throat on the sneak plan," some one answered, and the cry was generally echoed.

"You touch the right note, gentlemen," said Jumping Jake, "and if you say the word I'll

prove it. I say this fellow has a knife up his sleeve with which he intended to stab the conqueror of his friend in the back. Once more, I call on him to drop it!"

"I'll see you in perdition, first!" Ritter furiously exclaimed.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAGE OF TIGERS.

JAKE, the Jumper, was placed in a position far from agreeable. It had been the policy of those attached to the circus to keep the peace wherever they went, while at the Bar both he and Hamed were going at a gallop on a road which might lead to jail.

One moment he hesitated, but as a twinkle satisfaction appeared in Ritter's eyes his resolution was taken.

"Since you have failed to stab my friend in the back," he said, "I suppose I might drop the matter; but it stands as a question of veracity between you and me. Allow two men to look in your sleeve and, if they don't find any knife, I'll withdrew my charge."

"No human being shall look in my sleeve!" Ritter declared, his voice defiant, but his eyes plainly looking for a loophole for escape.

"Go fur him, Jakey!" cried the Tiger-Tamer, still keeping his hold on Arnold.

The words were yet on his lips when Jake moved. Ritter had foreseen his purpose and he tried to draw a revolver to a bead, but it was knocked from his hand by one blow from the acrobat and he was seized in a resistless grasp.

One moment they were twisted up in a confused way and then Ritter went spinning back and Jake held up an ugly-looking knife.

"That's what he uses on men's backs," he announced. "I took it from his sleeve; you see what his style is."

The youth had undoubtedly won a strong point and black looks were turned on Ritter and his older friend, but just then there was an interruption. Some one had conveyed word to the town's sheriff that a fight was going on, and he now appeared in the door.

The scene changed. There were men there who hated law and order, and were opposed to seeing a good fight interrupted and the principals jailed, and there was a crash of glass as some one sent the lamps flying and the room was plunged in darkness.

"Get out o' hyar on ther jump!" some other person said, in Jake's ear, and the latter saw the wisdom of the advice.

It would make it bad for him to be arrested in Slashaway Bar.

He turned to Hamed, found him without trouble and the two glided away together.

"It ain't my style ter skulk an' run," said the Tiger-Tamer, "but ther good o' ther circus demands that I keep ther peace an' I'll do it ef I have ter fight for it."

"Do you suppose those men will know us if we meet again?" Jake asked.

"They'll be foolsef they forgit," said Hamed, with a grin. "I put a plaster on my man's back. That floor wasn't overly clean."

The two had not stopped while talking, and by that time they were well beyond the hotel

and near the circus shanty. When sure there was no danger of pursuit, Jake stopped and took Hamed into his confidence in regard to the plot of Chapman and Hendrix. Lacking any more reliable ally, he felt it would be well to have the Tiger-Tamer on his side.

The following day found Slashaway Bar as usual. The trouble at the hotel had been quietly settled, and there was no whisper to tell Jake and Hamed that their identity was known. Tom Arnold and Ritter were not seen near the circus ground, and it looked as though no one had connected the two men of the hotel fight with the characters they really filled.

The hour for the performance drew near. The long-named circus did not depend so much on quantity as quality, as the people found when they went in to view the animals and curiosities; but the Living Skeleton and Fat Woman, and two untamed Bengal tigers were duly admired. Other beasts which seemed to have been too much tamed made little impression.

Omitting all previous details, let us say that it was when "Jacopo Campani," the so called Italian acrobat, came on the scene that the enthusiasm of the audience aroused. Jumping Jake was found to be all that was claimed for him, and his acrobatic feats were astonishing to Slashaway Bar.

Nor was Mr. Chapman less surprised. He sat among the audience, a quiet spectator, but he found that Hendrix had told the truth when he eulogized the youth so highly.

The Jumper was certainly a wonder.

The time approached when he was to perform what was deemed his greatest act. The untamed Bengal tigers were in an ugly mood. They were hungry, and their roars had slightly disturbed even the miners' serenity. Now, Jumping Jake was to take a long leap over their den.

The cage was wheeled into place and the top removed. The fierce brutes pulled at their chains and the audience instinctively looked for the nearest way of escaped in case they snapped the chains.

Everything was arranged for Jake's leap. The spring-board was put in place and men muttered to themselves as they saw the distance he must cover. One false move would cause him to fall short and drop in the cage with the hungry, roaring tigers.

Chapman chuckled inwardly. Hendrix had assured him the spring-board had been tampered with, and he had no doubt but the tigers would be tearing the young acrobat's flesh in a few moments.

Jumping Jake had been given a short breathing-spell and he now came on the scene in good condition. Mr. Drinkwater himself always superintended this dangerous act, and he was at his post as usual and thrice as calmly as ever.

Then Drinkwater explained the feat and the miners sat in hushed expectancy.

The Jumper stood at the further end of the board and viewed his course with an unwavering eye. The hungry tigers roared, but it was familiar music to him.

"Now!" said Drinkwater, with a gentle smile.

Jumping Jake ran lightly along the board, his movements greeted by a reverberating roar from the cage. The open top was like the yawning crater of an active volcano.

With a graceful run Jake reached the middle of the board and lunched himself upward for the turn in mid-air; but as he did so there was a sharp crack and the excited miners saw the board part like a pipe-stem.

And they saw, too, that the young acrobat, instead of taking a long and graceful leap, perceptibly failed to get the necessary impetus; they saw at first glance that he must fall short and directly in the tigers' cage, and as the hungry brutes roared louder than ever, a stifled groan arose from the audience.

Down came the Jumper, and every spectator arose as he fell fairly in the cage, midway between the tigers.

With a terrible roar the brutes leaped from their corners toward him and a wicked smile stole to Drinkwater's face.

But what followed amazed him. The tigers, which had always been able to meet in the cage by reason of the length of their chains, this time failed to do so. As they leaped forward, they were arrested and jerked back as though their chains had been miraculously shortened.

And Jumping Jake?

When he alighted in the cage, it was squarely upon his feet, and then, without losing his balance, he arose in his old, graceful way, and somersaulted out of the cage without a scratch from the Bengal tigers.

One moment the hush hung over the audience and then a cheer arose which shook the building. Jake, the Jumper, had the sympathy of every honest man in the place just then, and they showed it, not only by cheering, but by shaking his hand.

Mr. Drinkwater, baffled and angry, was trying to control his face and was pressing forward to join in the hand-shaking when a heavy hand fell on his own shoulder.

"You're my pris'ner, my snaky chap," said a gruff voice.

Drinkwater looked at the speaker.

"What?" he demanded.

"I say you are my pris'ner. Sech doin's ez these can't thrive in Slashaway Bar while I, Gaffer Burke, hold ther plow. It's ther suit o' Jacopo Campani vs. you snaky chaps!"

And the young acrobat, parting the crowd with his hands, cried:

"Let no man leave the building. This accident was a put-up job on me, and the men who took part in it are wanted. Guard the doors!"

Something like a suspicion of the truth fell upon the miners and they obeyed the order. Back among them was a man with a scared face, but he dared not try to break through. This was Chapman.

Drinkwater and Hendrix had both been arrested, but their angry remonstrances were cut short and Jake was given the floor.

"Men of Slashaway Bar!" he said, in a ringing voice, "I accuse the managers of this circus of plotting against my life and call on you for

justice. I will show you that the spring-board was tampered with, and that it was the intention that I should fall into the tigers' cage and fall victim to them."

An angry murmur arose from the miners and Sheriff Burke deemed it prudent to get his prisoners into a recess where no one could harm them.

"Raise your carol, Jacopo," he then said. "Tell what you know an' no more. Justice shall be did while I hold ther plow."

"I'll tell what I know," said Jake. "I received a note since I came here warning me that a plot was on foot against my life; that the spring-board was to be tampered with so that I would fall short in my leap and drop in the tigers' cage, there to be devoured by them. I resolved to test the truth of this information, and for this purpose took Hamed, the Tiger-Tamer, into my confidence. Early this morning we discovered that the genuine spring-board had been removed and an inferior one put in its place. More than this, there was no doubt but the second one would break under the strain put upon it."

Thus far the accused men had heard in silence, but Drinkwater now interrupted:

"I trust none of you will believe this absurd story. There has been no such plot as is claimed. If the boards were mixed it was by accident; I know nothing about it."

"You stifle your carol!" advised Sheriff Burke. "When your turn comes you kin orate; jestice shall be done while I hold ther plow."

"Whose duty is it to look to the board?" cried Jake. "That of men selected by Drinkwater. Who oversees my dangerous leap at its time of performance? Drinkwater, himself. Now, I'll tell you why I went on with my act; 'twas because I was bound to *prove* what I now charge. I said Hamed was in my confidence. So he was, and it was he who arranged an ingenious way of taking up the chain, of shortening it, so the tigers could not get at me. You saw how it worked; I went into the cage, but the shortened chains held the tigers back and I came out all right. That, however, don't change the complexion of the deed. What do you say of a man who would deliberately put another in a den of tigers?"

An angry shout arose from the miners and more than one brawny fist was shaken at the head of the circus.

And about the same time Chapman found a hand laid on his arm.

"You're wanted, too, ole broadcloth," said a rough-looking man. "I'm Deputy-sheriff Sparks, and when I git ter whirlin' ther fire flies."

Chapman assumed a very haughty and indignant manner, but he was among men who couldn't be easily frightened. The rich man rules the large cities of the East, but he can't always get his grip on the mining-towns.

Still protesting, Chapman was taken near his partners in crime. Once there he received a hint from Drinkwater, who, looking him full in the face, said aloud:

"Sheriff, you may do with us as you see fit. This is not the time for a defense, but you can

rest assured this ridiculous charge will be exploded in due time. Take us away!"

And Burke obeyed, keeping his grasp always on his man, but declaring justice should be done while he "held the plow."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM PERPLEXITY TO CONFUSION.

JUMPING JAKE had thus far carried everything before him. He had come out of Chapman's trap in safety, and won Shashaway Bar over to his side, but he was not one to let matters rest.

He had asked the sheriff to put the prisoners in separate rooms when he confined them, and thus it was that Chapman had been but a few minutes alone, when the door reopened, and the young acrobat walked in.

The two looked at each other in silence for a while. Twenty-four hours before Jake had not known there was such a person as Chapman in the world, but he now saw in him his worst enemy, without having the remotest clew to the cause of his enmity.

"Well," he said at last, "you see I have called on you."

"Without an invitation," Chapman haughtily replied.

"Precisely. Neither did I invite you to plot to kill me."

"Bah!—this is rubbish. I suppose you think you can blackmail me, or something of the kind. Well, I am a stranger in this place, and as the ruffianly sheriff had things all his own way, I have kept quiet. You will see at the trial, however, that you are making a big mistake."

"What shall you do?"

"I shall prove my unblemished character so that even Shashaway Bar will believe, and I'll show you the consequences of perjury."

"Suppose I withdraw my charge?" Jake slowly asked.

"That's another question," Chapman said, with unguarded quickness.

"And throw all the blame on Drinkwater?"

Chapman opened his lips, closed them, and then reopened them for an answer.

"From my point of view there is no blame anywhere. It seems to me but an accident."

"We will not speak of that. Suppose I withdraw my charge against you?"

The man was very near falling into the trap, but prudence came to his aid. He saw where a sting might be, if it was not, and hastened to avoid it.

"I don't ask you to withdraw," he haughtily said. "I will not bear of a compromise. My character has been unjustly assailed, and I will right it to your cost."

"You prefer to fight?"

"Yes."

Jake coolly sat down on the edge of the table.

"If you say 'war,' so be it. We'll go in, tooth and nail, and the top cat shall take the medal. Seriously, Mr. Chapman, I want to say you are in a serious situation, and it behooves you to go light and look out for yourself.

Slashaway Bar won't stand any fooling, and your hold is to compromise with me."

"Oho! so it's blackmail, just as I thought."

"No; it's not blackmail. I don't want a red cent, or a white one out of you; but what I do call for is a showing of hands. Why do you wish me dead?"

"Why shouldn't I after what you've done?"

"What have I done?"

"You've sworn a false charge against me."

"Nonsense!—I don't speak of that. Look further back. Why did you hire Hendrix to kill me?"

"I did nothing of the kind."

"'Tis false! Up in your room at Ryan's hotel you and Hendrix arranged the preliminaries."

Here Jake repeated all he could remember of what Idalah Arnold told him, and Chapman could not but see that there must have been a listener at the interview. He was alarmed, but nothing was further from his thoughts than a confession.

"This is a pretty tale," he sneered.

"We shall prove it if need be. Come sir, nobody values your hide more than yourself; confess and get out of the fix as cheaply as possible. What old grudge do you hold against me?"

"Your impudence is great. What grudge should I hold against you? What are you to me? From my point of view it would be like the sun hating a tallow candle for me to give you a thought."

Chapman spoke haughtily, ostentatiously playing with his gold watch and chain, but Jumping Jake was not to be deceived.

"We won't speak of what might be, but of what is," he coolly said. "For some reason you wished me dead and hired Hendrix and Drinkwater to drop me in the tigers' cage. The game didn't work and I am right-side up with care. Consequently, I say, make a clean breast of it and we will settle affairs up to mutual advantage. If you refuse, sir, I'll press the case to the furthest limit!"

"Press and be hanged!" Chapman hotly cried. "See here—get out of this cell or I'll kick you out!"

There was an evil light in his eyes and there could be no doubt but he meant what he said. Jumping Jake, however, met the threat with his usual coolness.

"That's as you see fit; of course you run your own engine," he carelessly observed.

The words seemed to rouse Chapman to a fury and he dashed at the youth with his fists doubled. For the moment he forgot his desire to have Jacopo Campani go out of the world without his visible help, and there was murder in his heart, but Jake wasn't inclined to play the part of a martyr.

As the man rushed forward the young acrobat stooped for a moment and then arose high in the air with a graceful hand-spring, shooting over Chapman's head in a way which made good his claim to be the champion acrobat.

"You'll find me around this side," he then coolly observed. "You must have mislaid me."

Chapman uttered a curse as he wheeled, but the evil light was still in his eyes. Again he rushed at the youth who, this time, had a different course in view.

He made a feint of leaping in the old way but, checking himself, saw Chapman put up his arms and thus leave his front unguarded. It was the chance for which Jake waited, and with a skillful stroke at his enemy's stomach he laid him on his back.

A moment more and Jake was at the door.

"If you change your mind," he said, as Chapman slowly arose, "send for me; but bear in mind that if you try this trick again when I call it'll be more than a rap in the stomach you'll get."

Chapman did not answer. He had received a blow which left a pain behind it, and he began to realize that victory is not always with the strong and mature. He did not care to try the Jumper again.

"Remember," added the latter, "that if you see fit to make a clean breast of it and compromise, I am ready to hear you. Otherwise, I shall push the case."

His enemy growled a curse, and then Jake went out and closed the door behind him.

He went directly to the circus shanty. There he found things had settled down to a quiet, but far from languid, state. The Fat Woman and Living Skeleton were having an earnest talk at one side, and Hamed and Yusef were conversing with Grout, the ring-master.

Lacking any official head, the latter had assumed charge of the circus, but all knew the concern was at a standstill until Drinkwater got out of prison, and Jake thought Grout did not look at him with a friendly eye.

He was, however, kindly received by all, outwardly, and he knew the other performers were with him through thick and thin.

In a short time word was brought to Jake and Hamed that the village judge, whose name was Kerrigan, wished to see them at his office. They went, and found the office to be as small as was the judge. And besides being small, Mr Kerrigan was fussy and suspicious.

Plainly, he did not look on the Jumper with much favor.

"I want to know on what grounds you abut three men at a slap," he said. "I want to know if the sheriff has proceeded according to Hoyle."

"He considered the evidence sufficient—"

"His opinion is superficial, merely superficial. I want to know if I am satisfied."

Jake saw that he must humor the judge, so he told the story as he had explained it at the circus-ground. He was resolved not to mention Idalah, and rather hoped she would not come forward to testify, so he said, as before, that he had received his warning by letter.

"Humph! humph! humph!" muttered Kerrigan, when the story was told. "Evidence is insufficient. You receive an enormous letter—the judge meant an anonymous letter—and find your spring-board changed. No grounds for arrest; no court of Coke and Hoyle would convict; sad mistake on Burke's part."

He looked over his spectacles at Jake as

though he was a convicted criminal, and shook his head dismally.

"Why," began Hamed, "ther case is as clear as—"

"I want ter know what I think, not what you think," irritably interrupted Kerrigan. "Being unable to prove a case you may be confined for a year at hard labor for Slashaway Bar, according to Coke and Hoyle."

"I'd like ter see ther man that kin confine me!" the Tiger-Tamer hotly replied; but Jake pulled at his sleeve and he added: "Es long es your honor is on my side."

"Hold! hold!" said Kerrigan. "Am not sure I am on your side. I want to know what I think before I decide. Go away!"

Thus summarily dismissed they went. Hamed passed along toward Ryan's hotel for an evening drink, and to impress the public still further in their favor, but Jake started back to the circus shanty.

He had gone half-way when a figure sprung from behind a cabin and stood in his path. The darkness did not enable him to get a good view, but he saw that it was a woman even before she spoke.

"Hold on, boy!" she ordered; "I want to speak with you."

"Certainly," said Jake, politely.

"Don't play any airs on me. You are Jacopo Campani, are you not?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Do you know what you've done?"

"To what do you refer?"

She stamped her foot angrily.

"You have shut up Chapman; he was my best friend!" she angrily declared.

"Your worst one must be a poor specimen then," Jake could not help saying.

"Silence! How dare you speak thus? I say Chapman is my friend. How dare you insult him? Besides you are mad; mad, I say. He is your friend too."

"As a friend, he don't pan out heavy then. But, such remarks won't do any good. If you'll tell me who you are, and what you're driving at, I can talk more to the point."

"It's none of your business who I am."

"You are dealing in empty words, madam—"

"Empty, are they? You'll find them anything else. Do you hear me? I say your own life and safety depend on that of Chapman. While he lives you are safe; with him dead you are doomed. Doy, he must be released from prison before another sun goes down. Do you hear me? I say he must and shall!"

CHAPTER VII.

FRESH TROUBLE FOR JAKE.

JUMPING JAKE had been using his eyes as far as was possible while talking, and he had come to the conclusion that the unknown woman was middle-aged, small, thin-faced, nervous, and excitable. More than this, he could not see the use for further words with her.

"I don't run the judicial mill of Slashaway Bar," he said, when she finished her last speech, "and it don't rest with me to unlock the prison-door. This much I will say, however; show me good reason why I should intercede in his be-

half and I'll do it. As things stand now, I don't know him or you."

"You'll find us both out if you don't turn back!" she declared, again stamping her foot.

"Why not divulge now?"

"Because I won't!"

"Very good; I advise you to go and get quarters at an insane asylum," said Jake tartly.

With these words he began moving away.

"Do you defy me?" she called after him.

"I defy nobody, but as for ranting here, like a country tragedian, for an hour, I won't do it. Good-night!"

She did not call after him again and he soon disappeared in the darkness, but he did not by any means intend to lose sight of her. The mystery surrounding Chapman and his unexplainable hatred was one he was anxious to solve, and he intended to know more of the woman.

Accordingly, he quickly doubled on his track, and came around to the opposite side of the cabin just as the woman was moving away.

There was nothing about her manner which showed she was afraid of being pursued, and he moved along in the rear with considerable confidence.

She walked rapidly, not once looking behind her, and Jake easily saw that she was still acting under the nervous excitement he had noticed.

It was not a long walk she led him, but he felt somewhat surprised when he saw her enter the cabin of Tom Arnold. Events began to thicken, and links he had thought distinct to unite. What was the avowed friend of Chapman doing at Arnold's home? Had she learned of Idalah's share in Chapman's downfall, or—

As the door, promptly opened to her knock, and as promptly shut, closed behind her, a fresh question occurred to Jumping Jake.

Could it be he had been made the victim of a hitherto unsuspected plot, and that Idalah was the tool used by other and older heads?

One moment Jake considered the possibility, and then it was rejected. He remembered the face of Idalah, pure, refined, and gentle, and her manner, and he turned from the suspicion. No; whatever was the truth, the girl was not to be considered a plotter; she had told the truth.

"But that's no reason why I shouldn't know what's going on in Tom's cabin, if I can find out," he decided, as he moved forward again.

The cabin did not prove to be well adapted for his purpose. A light showed from the interior, but Idalah's womanly taste had placed curtains at the windows, and the door was closed.

Jake, however, was not easily discouraged, and he went down on his knees before the door where a ray of light shone through. By means of this crack he gained a slight view of the interior.

The first thing he saw was young Ritter, who was tipped back in a chair with his heels on the table, but it was not until he arose and went to the fire to relight his pipe that Jake saw any one else. His going, however, showed Tom Arnold and a woman in close conversation.

That the latter was the person he had fol-

lowed there the youth could not doubt, though her back was toward him.

He listened, but not a distinguishable word reached his ears.

Plainly, he must get another position to overhear what they were saying.

He went to each of the windows in succession, but all were fastened.

The situation was most annoying, for the Jumper felt that in their conversation lay the clew to much that perplexed him. If he could overhear it, he might be able to control a future which possibly would otherwise go all against him.

Yet, the means were lacking; for, even if he had felt justified in breaking a window, the noise would have betrayed him.

He had returned to the door when he heard voices at both his right and left at the same time. He was placed between two fires, and the danger of being accused of unlawful work aroused him to the necessity of escaping discovery.

He saw but one way.

Arnold's cabin was built with a roof so nearly flat that it was sloped only just enough to enable the water to run off. The eaves, as he had seen on a former occasion, came nearly down to the door, and the door was surrounded by an outside casing. These points, and his skill in jumping, he resolved to turn to his advantage.

A short spring upward enabled him to catch at the top of door-casing, and then with one of his acrobatic feats which had astonished so many, he swung himself to the roof.

He was none too soon, as the owners of the voices he had heard quickly met at the door. One passed quietly on, but the other knocked at the door.

"Hallo!" thought Jake, "is all Slashaway Bar coming here to-night? Now, who is this?"

Bending over the eaves he endeavored to get a look at the man's face, but though the light from the interior fell on his garments when the door was opened, showing them to be rough, mining clothes, his face remained in the shadow.

He was admitted without question, and Jumping Jake was left to wonder afresh. His recent interview with the woman convinced him that his name must be among those mentioned inside and he felt interested.

But how was he to learn anything?

A short examination of the roof convinced him he was helpless in the case. Unless those inside saw fit to raise their voices so he could hear at the door he would not be able to hear at all.

Satisfied that this was so, he dropped to the ground, went again to the door and applied his eye to the crack. He saw Arnold and Ritter seated at the table, and that was all he did see. Both were talking and their words were plain enough.

"I don't like whisky; it makes my head feel as though a rope was tied tight around it," said Ritter.

"Bah! as long ez I don't have any sech feelin' about my neck I don't keer a red," said Arnold. "Whisky is my p'izen right along."

And this was the important conversation Jake hoped to hear. He listened for a moment longer and then the truth flashed upon him. Arnold and Ritter were alone; the mysterious woman and the third man had silently left the cabin while he was examining the roof.

It was a bitter disappointment, for the youth had hoped to follow the woman when she left and thus strike the desired clew; but it might not yet be too late. Deserting his post, he ran along the street, looking eagerly at every person he saw. But not one of them was a woman; Slashaway Bar did not deal very heevily in the female sex, anyway.

Jumping Jake was finally obliged to confess himself beaten. No trace could be found of the strange woman, though he visited Tim Ryan's hotel and wandered about the village until tired.

At last he returned to the circus shanty, where he found his fellow professionals beginning to get anxious. Hamed and Yusef, who were playing poker, had made several wretched plays, and the Living Skeleton had just armed himself with a sword and announced his intention of going on the war-path.

The Fat Woman was so delighted at Jake's return that she barely restrained her impulse to embrace him, compromising by shaking his hand and that of the Living Skeleton at the same time.

A grand council of war was then held. It was unanimously decided that the five persons then present must "stick to each other like brothers," as the Fat Woman expressed it. They all doubted the loyalty of Grout, the ring-master, and felt that he was likely to be the friend of Drinkwater and his allies because there was money in it; therefore, the Banded Five, as the Living Skeleton suggested they call themselves, must be as cunning as serpents and as dangerous as possible.

The Jumper went to bed feeling that these friends, humble though they were, could be trusted in all ways, and he resolved to show a bold front in spite of sundry adverse circumstances; and if Judge Kerrigan went against him he must make the best of it.

He awoke in the morning with the freshness of youth and prepared for what the day might bring forth.

Events developed with a rush.

He had but just swallowed his breakfast when the Fat Woman rolled in to say that Sheriff Burke was at the door and calling for him—Jake—and that other men were with him who were plainly very angry.

A shadow crossed Jake's face. He scented danger even then and felt that his foes in Slashaway Bar had put up some job on him; very likely the unknown woman was at the bottom of it.

It was his way to face the storm, however, and he went promptly to the outer door. The first person he saw was the sheriff, looking very grave, and, just behind him were Tom Arnold and Ritter.

"Thar he is!" shouted Arnold, explosively; "thar is ther eternal young snake who has stole my gal. Oh! you murderous tough, whar is my gal, Idalah?"

And Tom shook his fist at the boy acrobat.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TURN OF THE TIDE.

THE youth was not surprised to hear Tom Arnold cry out against him, for the fellow surely had little reason to love him; but he was not prepared to hear Idalah's name mentioned.

He therefore stood speechless, and Ritter took up the song.

"Look at the young villain! That's the silence of conscious and detected guilt."

"Oh, you go and run your head against a rock, Ritter!" said Jake scornfully. "You may butt in a fresh stock of brains, and you can't spill any out. Sheriff, they say you want to see me."

"So he does, an' so do I—" began Arnold, but Burke broke in:

"You rest your lungs, old leather-head! I'm at ther front now, an' the steers go ez I say while my hand is on ther plow. You dry up! Jacopo Campani, ter wit, it air my painful duty ter arrest an' lock ye up, forthwith."

"On what charge?" tersely asked Jake.

"Abductionism."

"Abduction of whom?"

"Idalah Arnold, ter wit, forthwith."

"Yas, an' he won't git out right away, either," added Arnold, still shaking his fist.

"You hold yer hosses; I'm at ther plow now, an' I'll knock you cl'ar over a tombstone factory ef you don't keep still. Young feller, be you ready ter trot?"

"First of all, give me some light on this ridiculous charge," Jake replied, with some excitement. "What in the world do you mean? If the girl is abducted, I know nothing about it."

"Dry up, you hoss-thief!" said Burke, checking a speech from Arnold by a skillful left-hander. "Young man, you ax me too much; I ain't jedge o' Slashaway Bar, an' I can't tell ye how it come about. Peter Kerrigan will 'lucidate ther hull case, I reckon."

And this was all the sheriff would say, while as for Arnold and Ritter, he closed in on them when they became too familiar, and administered a few official thumps which sent them to the rear to stay.

Jumping Jake was marched to Kerrigan's office. On the way he had opportunity for thought, and he surely had enough to think about. So it was claimed Idalah was abducted! Was this a fact? Possibly, for her father was not her friend, and he would not scruple to shut her up in order to compel her to marry Ritter. This might be the case, but Jake could not avoid arriving at a different explanation.

He remembered the mysterious woman and what she had said to him. She was Chapman's friend, and a fierce, unreasoning, but devoted friend. She had tried persuasion and threats with equal lack of effect to make Jake withdraw his charge; and when she found all her efforts unavailing she had parted from him with the assertion that harm would come to him unless he let Chapman alone.

After this interview she went directly to Tom Arnold's cabin and talked with him for a con-

siderable time. Now, Jake was arrested, charged with the abduction of Idalah.

In all this the Jumper saw the hand of the unknown woman.

"I am hemmed in by mystery," he thought, as he walked by Sheriff Burke's side.

Kerrigan's office was reached in due time and they found that august official in his chair. He frowned more darkly than ever when he saw the young acrobat.

"Just as I expected!" he observed. "Expected to see you back again; you've got a bad face and I expect Coke and Hoyle will have you in tow just as long as you live. I want to know what such young ruffians are born for."

He glared at Burke as he spoke the last sentence, but the sheriff philosophically rolled his tobacco to the left side.

"I'll be chawed by a boar cornstriector ef I know, jedge, but what does it matter? Our hands are on ther plow an' we must t'ar up ther weeds."

"Humph! humph! humph!"

Muttering thus, the judge scowled at Jake again, as though he thought him an especially pernicious "weed," and then added:

"I want to know if you're guilty."

"If some one will explain the case I'll let you know. I have had no explanation, whatever."

"The long and short on't is, Idalah Arnold is stole and you done it. I want to know if you deny it?"

"I certainly do deny it," Jake indignantly answered, "and I call for your reason for accusing me."

"Plenty of them, plenty. The case is proved; you were seen carrying her off. T. Arnold, what's ther name o' ther witness?"

"Madame Lenoir, jedge, an'—"

"Ther hull case is writ', and I'll read the charge."

And the judge did as he said. Briefly, the document he produced purported to be the affidavit of one Madame Lenoir, a resident of the town. She claimed that, just as she was retiring the previous night, she heard a woman's cry outside her door. She opened it to see Idalah Arnold struggling in the arms of a man she distinctly recognized as Jacopo Campani, the circus performer. Being of a chivalrous nature she rushed to the rescue, but she was seized and hurled back with such force that she fell and, striking her head against the side of the door, lost consciousness.

A second paper read by Kerrigan purported to be the affidavit of one "Big Bill Benner." He testified that he was night watchman for Savage & Morgan, mine owners, and that, at a stated hour the previous night, a horse passed near his post at a gallop, a man and woman in the saddle. As they did so a female voice cried: "Help! Jumping Jake is carrying me off!" He thought it a joke, and in any case could not leave his post, but when he heard that Idalah Arnold was missing, he felt sure it was her voice he had heard.

For Idalah was missing; Tom Arnold said so, and he ought to know, and Jake, the Jumper, found himself in a pretty net.

Woman-stealing is a serious crime wherever honest men abide.

Jake saw more plainly than ever traces of the plot destined to crush him. That the Madame Lenoir of the affidavit was the mysterious woman he could not doubt; and he remembered that Big Bill Benner was the man who was to assist Arnold and Ritter in robbing his employers' mine, and that Ritter had boasted that he would do as he said.

Truly, they had chosen their tools well.

"I want to know what you're going to do about this," Kerrigan said, when the evidence was in.

"I'm going to tell the truth, judge. If you'll make inquiries you'll find I have a pretty clear record, and I ask you to believe me innocent now. It seems I have enemies in Slashaway Bar, and they have put up a job on me. This charge is false from beginning to end."

Judge Kerrigan groaned.

"If there was an inform-school near here you should go to it. I want to know what such monstrosities of nature are born for."

He looked sternly at Sheriff Burke, who shook his head.

"You kain't prove it by me, judge, fur my hand ain't on ther plow as a encyclopedigraph."

"Your claims are outrageous," Kerrigan resumed. "First you charge three honest men with conspiring to kill you, and when I shut them up by Coke and Hoyle, you fail to bring proof. Then, when the bottom falls out of your coffee-can, you say other men have plotted against you. I want to know if you expect any one to believe you?"

Jumping Jake did not expect anything of the kind. He saw he was in the toils and handicapped so that there was scarcely a ghost of a chance for him to win the race. His enemies were powerful and numerous, and once behind the bars he would be at their mercy.

The only friends he had left were his humble co-laborers of the circus, and they would be helpless in such a case.

There was little he could say for himself, but he made as eloquent an appeal as possible. Sheriff Burke looked uncertain, but Kerrigan was all against Jake. He plainly said there could be no doubt of the youth's guilt, and he should confine him in jail and release Chapman, Drinkwater and Hendrix at once.

It was done, and if any of the residents of Slashaway Bar retained their admiration for the agile leaper, they took care not to show it.

The tide had completely turned.

Even the Tiger-Tamer had nothing to say, but he went back to the circus shanty with a scowl on his face and called Yusef, Hebe and the Living Skeleton into council. All these humble people were devoted to Jake, and they vowed to stand by him. The L. S. even volunteered to lead a "mob" to storm the jail, but Hebe quenched his warlike ambition by reminding him that such a mob must be limited to the number of four. Sober thought convinced them that their only hope was to keep quiet for awhile.

Drinkwater and Hendrix returned to the shanty and the former made a little speech to the people. He told them that a successor to Jumping Jake would be found by the time the

latter's trial was ended, and that they would then go on their way as usual.

And no one raised their voice against the leader.

In the mean while Sheriff Burke had visited Jake in his cell.

"I'm hyar ez a neutral," said the worthy man. "I'm neither your friend nor enemy, but while my hand ez on ther plow I'm hopin' jestice will be did. Ef I kin help ye, so be it. What d'ye say?"

"What I want, sheriff," said the Jumper, frankly, "is to get some tidings of Idalah. Find her and I shall go clear."

He then explained his suspicion that she had been imprisoned by her father, though he neither gave his grounds for his suspicion nor revealed Arnold's designs on Savage & Morgan's gold.

And Burke went away declaring he would put his hand on the plow and "run her beam-deep in ther furrer o' jestice."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TIDE GOES OUT AGAIN, AND SO DOES SOMETHING ELSE.

JUMPING JAKE was left in an uncertain mood. He was in a bad fix and the powers were strongly against him; he was a poor and almost friendless youth against money, Chapman, Drinkwater and Kerrigan; but he could not help hoping a little from Sheriff Burke. The latter undoubtedly had a good heart, and though anxious not to run counter to Kerrigan, his superior, he seemed in earnest in his offer to seriously search for Idalah.

The day passed without events of importance. Judge Kerrigan, Hamed and the Fat Woman called on him, but nothing of importance came of it. The Tiger-Tamer and the Tattooed Man were doing what they could for him, but that wasn't much.

Night came without a change. The hours passed on; eleven o'clock arrived and Jake lay down on his rude bed.

Another hour passed and the Jumper was asleep. He began to dream too. He thought he was awakened by a singular scratching sound. It came from the outside of his cell, but he could not tell the cause. The noise continued a long time, and then a hole appeared in the wall and at the hole he saw the head and bright eyes of a rat. "Come," said the rodent, "I have made this tunnel so you can escape. Follow me!"

The impossibility of going through so small an opening, so troubled the dreamer that he awoke in earnest.

He was in darkness, and was about to turn over for another nap when a voice sounded distinctly in the cell:

"Guv'nor! I say, whar be you, guv'nor?"

Something familiar about the voice caused Jake to arise quickly. The words had come from the window and he moved that way.

"Hello!" continued the voice, "is that you, Jumper Jake—I say, is it you?"

"Yes," quickly replied the acrobat. "Who are you?"

"Weasel Jim. Don't you remember me?"

Jake did, indeed, remember the small boy who had brought him the note from Idalah and had afterward guided him to the cabin. He said as much and the voice continued:

"I'm byar ter pull ye out. I hev dug a hole 'round ther bars, an' loosened 'em ontill ye kin scratch through. Don't lose no time in so doin'. I've found out whar Idalah is, an' we'll go an' find her. Come, quick; I'm afeard they may diskiver us, ez I made some noise in diggin' in."

The dream of the gnawing rat had not been all a fiction.

The Jumper did not hesitate. At the East an innocent person may well reject a chance to escape and remain for trial, but in the West, justice sometimes gets too hungry for even an honest man's good.

So Jake, finding Weasel Jim had indeed made a clear way, crawled through the window as quickly as possible, and, preceded by the small boy, dropped to the ground.

He had barely done this, however, when a heavy hand fell on each boy, and, looking up, Jake saw Sheriff Burke.

"Wal, wal, I should say ther plow was outer kilter," the official dryly observed.

The voice was not harsh and Jake took courage. If it came to the worst he was resolved to use his fists and heels, as he had often done before, but if possible this must be avoided.

"Sheriff," he said, in a manly way, "I beg that you won't take me back in there. I'm innocent, and I only seek to escape persecution."

"Breakin' jail ez a cardinal meandisamer," said Burke, stumbling over the word "misdemeanor," but not speaking sternly. "Can't approve on't while my hand is on ther plow. Weasel Jim, you owdacious leetle varmint, how dar' ye engage in sech a proceeding?"

"Now, you see, byar, Gaff Burke, don't ye put yer nose in," advised Jim. "I've engaged ter take ther guv'nor ter whar Idalah is, an' I'll do it in spite o' you."

"Say that ag'in an' I'll commit ye fur contempt. My hand is on ther plow an' don't ye furgit it. But, Jim, ye don't mean ter say you know whar ther gal is, do ye?"

"Sart'in I do, Gaff. She's up ter Rockafeller, shut up; an' I s'pect Tom Arnold put her thar. Me an' ther guv'nor is jest goin' ter rescue her."

"So ye shall, by thunder! An' I'll go 'long with ye, I will. Whoop her up an' get ther hosses, Jim, an' we'll be off."

"Will you really aid me?" Jake asked, earnestly.

"Bet your ear-rings, I will. Kerrigan would rave an' t'ar ef he knowed it, fur ef we git ther gal from Rockafeller we must steal her, but while my hand is on ther plow I'll hev jestice if I t'ar up three-foot trees in gittin' it."

And half an hour later the three left Slash-away Bar, bound on a mission which was certainly fraught with danger. Jumping Jake, who had known nothing of Rockafeller, found out a good deal about it as they went. The town was ten miles from the Bar, but it was vastly different in every way. It was common-

ly said that every man and woman in the place had from one to twenty deliberate, cold-blooded murders on their hands. For women were there, and more numerous than at the Bar, but they were the outcasts of more respectable places and all bad. And the men were cut-throats of the worst kind.

If Rockafeller had been a large place it would have been the terror of Colorado, but internal quarrels had kept their numbers down to a comparatively safe pitch and whisky had done its share to disable them.

It was an interesting picture for Jake, but he shivered as he thought of Idalah in such company. The innocent girl was truly among wolves. And then, too, he saw why Burke had said the girl must be stolen if she was taken at all; the bravest sheriff in the world would have been mad to try to make an arrest in Rockafeller.

Rapid riding took the trio forward so that, at about two o'clock, they approached the outlaw village. Weasel Jim knew a good deal more about the place than Burke did, and he led the way to a point where they could get a good view.

Only two lights were visible, and Burke expressed the opinion that Rockafeller "had drank itself drunk an' turned in."

Weasel Jim had led them to a ledge which overlooked the village, and he explained how, from that point, he had seen Idalah conducted inside one of the cabins. The discovery had been purely accidental, for Jim had not then known she was missing, and was only looking on the village from curiosity.

"An' you b'lieve you kin find that cabin now?" questioned the sheriff.

"I know I kin, Gaff."

"Then heave ahead, but heave mighty sly. You know my hand ain't on ther plow now, an' ef we git seen thar will be a tremenjus t'arin' up o' foreign s'ile."

Jim led the way, and they entered the village. Each one was well armed, but they depended on secrecy to accomplish their work. Their force was scarcely suitable for open war on the outlaws of Rockafeller.

The small boy showed that he had a clear head, and led the way without hesitation to a cabin in the center of the village. To that place he had seen Idalah conducted but a few hours before.

Burke walked around the cabin, looking closely as he went, but it did not seem to present any vulnerable point except the door, and when this was cautiously tried it proved to be fastened.

"Ain't thar a winder?" Burke asked.

"Thar is some sorter a hole in ther ruff," Jim replied. "I reckon this byar is a big Injun prison-lodge."

"It seems they dare not trust each other," said Jake, taking the matter into his own hands. "Very well; lacking better means I shall ascend to the roof, go down and unfasten the door from the inside."

Weasel Jim eagerly requested this duty for himself, but Jake would not hear to it. He knew his small ally was shrewd and brave, but

he who entered the cabin should be able to fight as well as to proceed cautiously.

Gaffer Burke did not give his consent to the plan at once, for he knew Jake would run a great risk by trying. There was no knowing how many of the outlaws were inside, and even if there were no men there, a woman's scream would arouse the whole village.

"Wal, go ef you must," the honest sheriff at last said, wringing Jake's hand, "but be mighty keerful. Go light ez a bed-bug, an' remember ter look out fur number one ef it comes ter an uproar."

He then raised the Jumper to his shoulders, from which point the latter easily gained the roof. The danger was close at hand.

The youth found the roof quite firm, so that his movements did not give forth any betraying sound, and though the night was dark, he had no trouble in finding the trap-door which Weasel Jim had described.

He had a fear that it, too, was fastened on the inner side, but when he bent and lifted, it arose all right.

The way was open for him to enter, but—what awaited him below?

Intensely dark was the interior of the cabin, and not a sound reached his ears. Yet he was sure the place had occupants, and he remained for some time listening.

All remained silent.

It is no discredit to our young friend to say he hesitated at this stage of affairs. Brave he surely was; but with the outlaws of Rockafeller on every side, it required more than ordinary courage to descend into that dark and unexplored place. He had the means of going, but had he the means of getting out?

Putting all hesitation aside, he uncoiled the rope Burke had furnished, fastened it to the trap-door, slowly lowered the loose end, and then prepared to descend.

Slowly he went down, and was soon dangling in mid-air, going to an unknown fate.

CHAPTER X.

THE OUTLAWS OF ROCKAFELLER.

KNOTS had been made at regular intervals along the rope to aid the Jumper, and this, with his well-known skill in such matters, enabled him to go steadily and safely until his feet struck the floor.

He was fairly in the lair of his enemies, but he was far from being over the worst of it. With darkness all around, how was he to discover whether Idalah was there or not?

Once more he listened, and he felt sure he could hear slow and regular breathing, as of some sleeper. Yet, he did not know who it was, or how many other sleepers might be about him.

He now regretted that a light had not been brought from Slashaway Bar, but it was too late to think of it. He had matches, however, and dangerous as it would be to light one, it seemed better than to stumble about in the dark.

Cautiously he drew the slender piece of wood along the bottom of his boot. It flashed, spluttered, and increased to a steady flame.

The first thing Jake saw was a table, just in front of him, with a kerosene lamp upon it, and obeying his first impulse, he lit it as coolly as though the place were his own.

The light came up brightly, for a lamp of the kind, and Jake looked quickly about him. He was in a place so scantily furnished that it was a brief work. The only thing of interest was a bed in one corner. There Jake plainly saw two persons asleep, and as their faces were visible, he was not long in recognizing Idalah Arnold as one.

Her companion was a degraded-looking creature. Probably she had reached middle age, but a desperate attempt was made to keep up an appearance of youth. Her hair had been yellowed by bleaching, and the red paint on her cheeks shone in strong contrast to the pallor of the rest of her countenance.

She was not an inviting-looking creature, but Jake was glad to find matters no worse.

He began to consider his next step. Both Idalah and her watcher were fully dressed, and he saw that he had merely to overpower the unknown woman and then they could take Idalah and hasten away.

Already he was moving toward the door to admit Sheriff Burke, when a sharp rapping sounded at that point. Jake paused in alarm. Clearly this knocking had not proceeded from his friends; one of the Rockafeller people desired to enter the cabin; and with a momentary panic, Jumping Jake thought only of escaping discovery.

Forgetting that the open window and dangling rope would surely betray him, he thought that by hiding he might escape discovery and find out just how matters were situated; and with this idea in his mind, he dodged under the foot of the bed just as the imperious knocking was repeated.

It was followed by a stir above him, and the unknown woman sprung to the floor, rubbed her eyes, and then started for the door.

Jake watched closely as she opened it, and he then saw that she not only had to remove a bar but the man outside used a key. Then he entered.

A man of medium size but remarkably compactly built, with an evil face and a profusion of black hair and beard, and wild, flashing eyes.

This man, standing near the door, shook his fist at the woman.

"Blast you, Yellow Mag, your heels are gettin' slow!" he said. "Durn ye fur a lazy wench! When I knock I ginerally hev ther gates opened."

"I was asleep, Brian—fast asleep," she answered, with an evident wish to avert trouble but without any sign of fear.

"Makes no diff'rence; you've no business ter sleep when Brian Doone is wantin' ye. Ef ye was asleep, how comes ther lamp lit? Ain't it my orders ter never leave a bleeze a-goin'?"

Yellow Mag looked at the light reflectively, but Jake's own gaze was thus called to something else. For the first time he saw the dangling rope, and thought of the damage it was likely to do him. He wondered the others did not see it, and failing to discover Sheriff Burke

anywhere, braced himself for a struggle with Brian Doone.

"Hang me if I didn't put out the light," said Mag. "That kitten must have got up and lighted it."

She pointed to Idalah, who was by that time wide awake and looking at them with terror expressed on her face. Up to this time no indignity had been offered her, but the untimely visit of the black-bearded ruffian alarmed her.

"Wal, it's all right," Doone said, with an ugly smile. "I can't scold sech a pink o' beauties ez she is, for— Hello!"

He broke off abruptly, as his wandering gaze rested upon Jumping Jake's rope. Considering that he supposed the roofway securely fastened, it was a surprise to discover it open and the rope dangling down.

Mag saw it too, and both stared in amazement; but the tableau was not destined to be long-lived.

Jumping Jake clearly saw that the time had come for him to move. To delay longer was to lose his last chance, and it was not his nature to let such a chance slip.

He emerged from the cover of the bed, and, revolver in hand, crept toward Doone with a quick but cautious step. The time allowed him was but brief, but it was enough.

Lightly as he stepped, Doone finally heard him and wheeled. He was too late. With a strong hand and sure calculation, Jake struck, and the outlaw received the blow just back of his right temple.

He fell like an ox struck down by a butcher. Down at Jake's feet he dropped, and the youth saw that a second blow was not needed; Doone was insensible. He had been prettily disposed of, but a fresh danger quickly arose. Mag, recovering from her momentary consternation, ran screaming from the cabin, and Jake knew the whole town would soon be astir.

The absence of Burke and Weasel Jim at such a time was strange and ominous, but Jake did not hesitate. He turned toward Idalah, and, seeing by her expression she had recognized him, quickly said:

"I have come to rescue you, but not a moment is to be lost. Come with me."

She sprang forward, placed her hand in his, and they ran from the cabin together.

At the door, however, a new scene was presented to their view, and Jake saw Sheriff Burke struggling with several men. He saw clearly why aid had not come to him, and resolved not to let the brave official fight alone.

With one word to Idalah he sprang into the thick of the fray. Burke greeted him with a yell.

"Hooroar! Lay on well, pard, an' make ther plow t'ar up all creation!"

Jake knew it was the outlaws of Rockafeller who were against him, and obeyed Burke's order as best he could. He struck out with all the power of his youthful arm, and, by his great quickness, succeeded in avoiding the blows received in return.

Not a shot was fired by either party.

Three men turned on the youth and pressed him sorely. He was beginning to think of his

revolver when fresh cries aroused him anew, and he saw Weasel Jim making a vain attempt to protect Idalah from a huge ruffian.

Jake's resolution was taken in a moment, and with one of his wonderful leaps he shot clean over the heads of his own assailants and rushed to Weasel Jim's aid.

An outlaw had just bent the small boy over his knee, and was scientifically choking him, when something like a lightning-bolt struck him in the side and he turned a somersault and lay down to rest.

Around Idalah's waist Jake swung his arm, feeling like a knight-errant at bay, but just then the battle surged that way and Burke cried out, sharply:

"Into ther cabin, pards; it's ther only resort."

'Twas a desperate one, since the cabin would be a prison as well as a fortress, but Jumping Jake obeyed. He hurried Idalah inside, Jim followed, the sheriff brought up the rear and the door was slammed to and barred in the face of the outlaws.

"Whew!" breathed Burke, heavily, "I've never had sech a set-to ez that sence I put my hand on ther official plow. Seven on 'em had hold o' me at onc't, but I smashed three ag'in' ther cabin-wall an' chucked ther rest ter glory. Whoop her up ag'in! That's a good boy, Jimmy!"

He spoke to Weasel Jim who had run up the rope like a cat, closed and fastened the door above and thus destroyed one resort of their enemies.

The latter were hurling themselves against the outer door, but they should have known how useless it was. Had they not built the cabin themselves and to defy just such attacks?

"My hand ain't on ther plow in this hyar town," said Burke, "but I opine we hev scooped in ther fust trick."

"Two of them, sheriff, if I am any judge," said Jake. "Don't you see Brian Doone here?"

"So he is," and Burke looked at the insensible outlaw. "Now, then, this is cute, fur he's ther king-pin o' Rockafeller."

"Is that so?" Jake excitedly asked.

"Sure as sin."

"Then we have them on the hip."

"How?"

"Why, don't you see that with their leader as our prisoner we could dictate terms to them? They have us shut up, but their hands are tied while we hold Brian Doone in our grasp."

"Right you are, clean to the spiral column!" Burke agreed, and then he shook hands all around.

In the meanwhile the tumult at the door had ceased, and it was evident the outlaws were taking wind. The little party of defenders, however, became less sanguine after a little thought. It was true they held Brian Doone, but they were in the midst of his lawless followers and it was a wild, long and dangerous road back to Slashaway Bar.

CHAPTER XI.

BRIAN DOONE'S OATH.

JUMPING JAKE did not forget Idalah, and he

improved the first chance to go to her side. Her face was paler than usual, but she had a brave nature, and she smiled as he approached.

"I am sorry you are with us in this desperate venture," he said, "but we shall do our best to get out of it alive, and we certainly shall not desert you."

"I believe you," she promptly answered. "At any rate, I am no worse off than I was before. No worse! I am a thousand times better. Then, I was alone with those terrible people, and I saw no hope of escape. But how did you happen here?"

"One moment, first," said he. "How came you here?"

"I was stolen from my home by two of Doone's men, but from the circumstances of the case I cannot but strongly suspect—nay, I almost know—that my father was at the bottom of it."

"What can have been his object?"

"He is a cruel and unnatural father. He has always misused me, and of late he has sworn that I should marry Claude Ritter. I have as steadily refused, for I think I am too young to settle my future irrevocably, and Ritter is a wild, lawless, and wicked man. Father has daily grown more bitter, and now comes this abduction. I believe he hoped by placing me among these people to crush my spirit."

Jumping Jake thought he could see a double motive, and then, as the lull continued outside, he rapidly told what had befallen him at Slash-away Bar.

"In conclusion," he said, "I think your father has joined hands with my enemies, and, besides conquering you, it was thought by throwing suspicion on me, sufficient grounds would be obtained to ruin me."

"And this man is my father!" said Idalah, brokenly.

"I doubt it. From the first I have thought it strange you were so little like Thomas Arnold, and after what has occurred, I more than ever doubt if you hold such a relationship to him."

Before more could be said, a sharp cry from Weasel Jim caused them to turn. Brian Doone had opened his eyes and was sitting erect. He stared blankly for a moment and then leaped to his feet, but he came up harmless enough.

Burke had taken the precaution to remove his weapons and tie his hands behind his back, and he struggled in vain to free himself.

"Curses on you!" he roared, "who're you that dares put strings on me? Take them off or I'll crush you inter powder!"

"Sing soft an' low, brother," advised Gaffer Burke, with provoking calmness. "We're them ez don't fear ye fur a cent, an' while my hand's on ther plow I'll whoop her up ez I see fit. Mark it down with a big-bladed pen!"

Doone rolled his eyes around the room in a fury. They rested on every one and the truth seemed to dawn on him at last. He wrenched at his bonds like a dog at a bone and then an evil smile crept over his face.

"Them as gets ther swill laughs last," he said, slowly. "Ef you think ter get out o' Rockafeller alive you hev straddled ther biggest sort o' a mistake."

"One thing goes in with that, like ez a death's head hez two eyes," Burke coolly observed. "Ef we don't get out o' Rockafeller I pity you."

"You dare not harm me."

"Like fur like is my rule, Brian Doone. Ef I go under you die with me. I'm a peace-lovin' man, but I've see'd my share o' wild life in days agone an' when I hold ther plow I turn a wide furrer or none."

"I know you, Gaff Burke, an' I won't furgit this," the outlaw answered. "I'll have your life fur this some day; I swear it."

"Oh! never mind whoopin' her up; I'd b'ieve your word jest ez quick es your oath," Burke truthfully said.

Just then there came a heavy knock at the door, and when the sheriff answered it they received a regular summons to surrender.

"Doone," said Burke, "order your critters ter git out an' give us free passage."

"Never!" declared the outlaw.

"Jest as you say, but you'll squeal sooner or later."

And when the demand from the outside was repeated, the sheriff politely told the speaker to "go to thunder." Clearly, however, the order was disobeyed, or obedience was delayed, for the unseen went on to say that unheard-of calamities would befall the little garrison if they held out.

"I've had the small-pox an' whoopin'-cough," replied Burke, "an' I reckon I'm good fur another mild disease. Come right on, mister, an' you'll find me ter hum."

Nothing could dampen the worthy sheriff's good spirits, but as the war-cloud closed in it became clear to all that they were in a bad fix. They were matched against a town, and the men of Rockafeller never gave quarter or mercy.

Doone, finding his wrath disregarded, sat sullenly down in a chair and said no more, but the light in his fierce eyes told that a world of passion was surging through his mind.

It seemed as though the men outside were at a loss what to do. Probably, having built the cabin themselves, they knew that only desperate means—like powder or fire—would enable them to enter, and these they dared not use while their leader was within.

They were heard prowling along the roof, but no real attempt was made to enter.

In this way an hour passed, and then Doone leaped to his feet.

"A murrain on this inaction!" he exclaimed. "I'll break ther dead-lock ef I have to give way myself. Gaff Burke, give me ther gal an' you may walk out scot free."

"When I walk, she walks with me," carelessly replied the sheriff.

"So be it then," said Doone, savagely. "I won't stay cooped up hyar like a rat. Open the door an' I'll tell my braves ter give you safe passage."

"Sing soft an' slow," advised Burke. "I don't see fit ter go afore day, fur ther road is too favorable fur ambushes, an' when I do go, you keep me company half-way on ther trail."

The furious look on Doone's face as he sunk back on his chair showed that Burke had indeed penetrated his trick; he would have made a

show of yielding and then taken care that the party never reached Slashaway Bar alive.

But, detected thus, he resolved to give way entirely and let them depart. If they succeeded in keeping out of his clutches for any great length of time, it would be one of the few times he had been foiled.

He announced his unqualified surrender, and they but awaited the coming of day.

This hour soon arrived; the door was thrown open and Doone appeared therein, with the sheriff and a revolver just behind him, and as several of the Rockefeller men were in sight their leader at once addressed them. He explained the situation and declared his will that they should give his immediate companions free passage, and there was no one to demur.

The party marched out with Burke and Doone at the head, Jake and Idalah next, and Weasel Jim as a rear-guard, and the outlaws looked in silent rage at the little army which had defeated them.

But no one offered harm.

Our friends found their horses as they had left them. An extra one had been brought for Idalah, but no provision had been made for the outlaw.

"You'll have to leave me," he grimly said.

"Ef my hoss ain't good fur two, somebody's been cheated," said Weasel Jim. "Scramble up hyar an' we'll get along like the Chinese Twins.

Jim's idea was voted good, and Doone was given the position, despite his dark scowls.

Then they made haste to leave Rockefeller behind them. The trail was not bad, though often no more than a shelf of rock at the top of a precipice, and they rattled along in a satisfactory way.

"You've got out o' this with a whole hide, Gaff Burke," said Doone, on the road, "but I give you warnin', the game ain't through. Nobody ever did me harm an' lived ter crow over it."

"Fur my part I leave crowin' mostly ter roosters," replied Burke, "but we'll skip that. Ez fur your oath o' vengeance, you'll find me ter hum 'most any time."

"Don't think I sha'n't look for you."

"Pile right in, jedge, whenever you feel like hev'n' a social chat."

"Curse you, it's your blood I want!"

"I'm afraid you'll go down ter your grave a-hankerin', then," the sheriff candidly answered.

Jumping Jake had not had faith at any time that Rockefeller would keep the peace as agreed upon. He had watched sharply by the way, but no grim riflemen appeared on cliff or in thicket, and the place where they had agreed to release Brian Doone drew near.

Burke reined in his horse at last.

"Here we part," he said, to Doone. "It looks a leetle rough, but I'm afeard you'll hev to huff it back ter yer moral town."

The outlaw silently dismounted, and, folding his arms, stood facing them.

"Go!" he said, in a deep voice.

And they went, not at all unwilling to lose such a companion on the trail.

"Ez bad a customer ez Colorado kin boast on," the sheriff muttered.

"I fear we are not yet out of the woods," said Jake, quickly. "The trail has been crooked and like a half circle in shape. What if some of Doone's men have gone a more direct route and are in ambush at the front?"

"They won't ketch us ef they be. I, too, think that's Doone's object, but we'll strike out on a new route an' save our bacon. Ther Philistines ain't got us, yit."

CHAPTER XII.

TROUBLE CONTINUES.

THE deviation was made as the sheriff suggested, and he led them along a road which, though rough, was far safer than the regular trail to Slashaway Bar. No sign of the Rockefeller outlaws was seen, and as they neared the Bar their hearts grew lighter.

When they sighted the village, they had reason to suppose their troubles were over for a time, for the testimony of Idalah would prove Jumping Jake innocent; but as they were winding through the last of the gulches which hemmed the Bar in, they were aroused by a shouting in the rear, and looked around, to see Yusef, the Tattooed Man, running toward them.

They paused, and he came up panting.

"Don't go any further," he said.

"Hallo! What's up now?" asked Jake, who knew Yusef was no fool.

"They're huntin' fur ye all, an' ther red flag is out."

"They'd better take it in afore it gets wet," retorted the sheriff. "Wal, I'm goin' thar ter make ther crooks straight an' ther cranks civil."

"But you're outlawed!" urged Yusef.

"What?"

"I say you're outlawed."

"Whar—when—how?" stammered Burke.

"Ther jedge o' ther Bar—I believe his name is Kerrigan—has put up an official placard, in which he says you helped Jacopo off, an' he tharin declares you an outlaw, an' offers fifty dollars for your capture."

The returned adventurers stared in amazement.

With Burke it was something else, and his face was purple.

"Outlawed!" he shouted. "I'm outlawed from the Bar, an' Kerrigan did it? An' they want me thar, an' offer fifty dollars fur me? Tarant'lers an' toe-corns! I'll be shot ef I've see'd sech a cold day sence I put my hand on ther plow."

It was a picture to see his rage and chagrin.

"Hold on, sheriff; it'll be all right when we bring back Miss Idalah," said Jake.

"No, it won't," Yusef quickly added. "Tom Arnold now says she stole all ther money he had—a hundred dollars, I b'lieve; an' that Jake didn't abduct her, but they runned away together, an' stole ther money together."

There was a momentary silence, during which all remained mute from amazement. The evil clique at the Bar was indeed making a relentless crusade against them, and the utter

villainy of the whole business was now almost beyond belief.

Idalah began to indignantly deny the charge of theft but was cut short by Jake who assured her they did not for a moment credit it; Yusef explained that Hamed, Hebe, the Living Skeleton and himself had been out watching for their friends' return; and Burke fell into deep thought.

He aroused in a few moments, however.

"If Kerrigan offers fifty dollars reward fur me I'm gwine inter town ter 'arn it; I am, by thunder! And I'll make Rome stand on its hind legs an' howl. But ez fur you ones, no! It comes home ter me straight that we must now buck cunnin' up ag'in' cunnin'. 'Tain't no sorter use fur you ter go in on yer muskle an' git ruuned into ther jug. I know a hole in ther hills—a reg'lar underground palace—whar ye kin hide an' thumb yer noses at Kerrigan an' his crew. Strikes me we had best go in fur ther hand that wins in ther eend."

Burke's remarks were voted good and they retraced their steps for a fourth of a mile and then turped to the left and entered the cave of which Burke had spoken. We will describe it later.

There was much about it that was comfortable and convenient, and there it was agreed they should make their home for the present. How many supporters they could command at the village was, as yet, uncertain, though Burke proposed to learn.

"Yusef, Hamed, Hebe and the Living Skeleton I can rely on through thick and thin," said Jake.

"Judgin' by ther size o' ther last two, I should say thick an' thin fits well," said the sheriff, preparing to go away.

He went, Yusef leaving him company on the first of his journey, and Jake, Idalah and Weasel Jim were left alone in the cave. The latter was the only really happy one of the party; he had a boy's imagination for underground dwelling-places and a boy's freedom from rheumatism.

Gaffer Burke went on toward the village. It was important that the Tattooed Man should not be known as his active friend, so they separated in due time and Gaffer marched on alone.

Oddly enough, since he was so much looked for, he reached the village unseen and, once there, the few who saw him did not see fit to touch so noted a fighter. He went directly to Kerrigan's office, marched in and found the judge and Drinkwater together, and then let the butt of his rifle fall heavily to the floor as they looked at him in mute surprise.

"I've come fur that fifty dollars!" he announced.

Kerrigan glanced about as though looking for some hole through which he might dodge and flee from the wrath to come.

"What fifty dollars?" he feebly asked.

"Ther fifty you offered fur my capture," Burke sternly replied.

"Have—have you?"

"Don't you see I hev?" roared the sheriff. "See hyar, old Kerrigan, be you drunk or crazy? You outlaw me, do ye?—me, ther noblest

Roman o' you all! What d'ye mean? Duin yer ole pewter-head, I say what d'ye mean?"

Burke pounded the floor with his rifle and then made a pretense of raising the weapon to a bead. The result was marvelous. Kerrigan tipped over the table and lay shivering behind it, while Drinkwater held a chair before him for protection and begged for mercy.

"Get up, you bleatin' calves!" said Burke, contemptuously. "Get up an' talk business; that's what I'm hyar fur."

The valiant pair resumed their seats, and then the sheriff came down to bed-rock.

"What's ther charge ag'in' me?" he demanded.

"Helpin' off Jake, the Jumper," Kerrigan feebly said.

"Who says I helped him off?"

Kerrigan hesitated; he had put his name bravely to the placard branding Burke, but he dared not shoulder the responsibility with his doughty ex-associate before him.

"It is generally so believed," he muttered.

"General thunder!" said Gaffer, politely. "So I am accused of helpin' a pris'ner out o' jail! I say it's a lie. I've had my hand on ther plow fur some time in this hyar burg an' nobody hez r'ared ag'in' me before. It's a pretty pass when a sheriff is thusly accused. No; I did not help Jake out; he owes nothin' ter me in that line. What're you goin' ter do about it?"

"I don't know," was the feeble reply.

"You don't, eh? Wal, you hev offered a reward fur my capture; you must hev had some dim, far-away idees in your noddle then."

Drinkwater had been coaxing up his own courage, and as Kerrigan looked like a wilted weed he came to the front.

"Against you, personally, we have no enmity, Mr. Burke," he said, "but we do wish to root out the evil-doers of Slashaway Bar and our placard was put out under the impression that you were in league with them. We are your friends, still, but that young hound, Jacopo Campani, and his desperate girl ally, must be brought to justice."

"Wel wel wel" mimicked Burke. "A body would think you owned ther Bar. Who is 'we'?"

"The people!" frowned Drinkwater. "For my own part, I speak for the circus. I find I have been sheltering a young ruffian in the person of Jacopo Campani and I am resolved not to abate one jot or tittle of righteous zeal because he is my hired man."

"Look a little out that your 'righteous zeal' don't run ye inter a sled!" cautioned Burke. "Sence I've had my hand on ther plow I've see'd some dramaros from real life, an' I've see'd 'em as kicked like a flint-lock gun."

With this mystic caution, Gaffer turned to Kerrigan.

"How is it, jedge; am I an outlaw?" he grimly asked.

Kerrigan wished to reply affirmatively but dared not.

"Since you are not in league with the desperadoes, we shall be glad to have you back in your old office," he meekly said.

Gaffer had expected this ever since he saw how the interview was going, and he was wise enough to take what the gods bestowed and not

ask too much. As sheriff of Slashaway Bar he could do his young friends a good deal of good, while, if he insisted on pardon for all, he would probably lose what he had gained. He therefore said that he would at once resume his duties.

"Of course we expect you to hunt down Jumping Jake," added Drinkwater, looking at him keenly.

"Hallo!" quoth Gaffer, "another back county heered from. Wal, I should whisper! Allow me ter ask what in thunder an' blue-edged lightnin' you mean by 'we'? Are you mayor, or alderman, or tax-payer o' this hyar town? What is it ter you, I say? Has Jake stole your money? Ef so you ain't but just thought on't. Do you mean ter raise a riot an' run ther Bar, or why're you so rabid ag'in' ther boyee?"

"I believe in justice," said Drinkwater, angrily.

"You do, do ye? Wal, I swow it never occurred to me afore that you was tuk that way. But whether you be or no, hark ter my bazoo: While my hand is on ther plow in this hyar burg no outsider don't help me team my cattle; an' I'll punch ther head o' ther man who steps in ther furrer I turn. Ye hear me?"

Beyond a doubt Drinkwater *did* hear, and he looked angry enough to annihilate a few ordinary Colorado sheriffs; but this particular sheriff showed too much courage and muscle to be interfered with safely; and so peace once more reigned in Slashaway Bar and Gaffer Burke stood at the plow.

CHAPTER XIII.

JAKE RETURNS TO THE BAR.

THE managers of the circus showed no intention of moving on and their only visible ambition seemed to be to hunt down Jake, the Jumper. Mr. Chapman kept his room at Ryan's hotel and seemed to be a very peaceful and worthy man. When asked about the charge laid at his door by the young acrobat, he said it was purely vicious and that, having been righted, he had no disposition to pursue Jake, but would rather give him time to repent. Some of the miners failed to see how the charge against Chapman had been proved false merely because Judge Kerrigan had dismissed it, but no such views were given publicly.

Drinkwater and Hendrix were open enough in their expressions. They said Jumping Jake had disgraced the circus and must be punished.

Hamed, Yusef, Hebe and the Living Skeleton held their peace and waited for the time when they could aid their young friend.

And Sheriff Burke, thoroughly aroused, resolved to get at the bottom of the mystery, if possible.

He did not go near the cave where he had left his young friends again that day, but he sent a young Irish gi l, named Kitty O'Neil, to keep Idalah company, and then devoted his attention to looking out for the plotters of the Bar.

After dark he went himself to the cave. There he found Idalah, Kitty, Jake and Weasel Jim, making the best of their situation, and, despite their limited means, quite comfortable.

He took Jake aside for a serious talk.

"Have you gained any clew ter ther mystery?" he asked.

"None. How can I? I am a humble young fellow, an attachee of the circus as far back as I can remember almost. They have billed me as 'Jacopo Campani, but I am American and my name is Jacob Morrill. I have no reason to think I am a rich man's son. Yet, suddenly Chapman appears. From

the talk between him and Hendrix it seems the circus people have been keeping me for him for a long time. And, finally, when he sees fit to have me killed, they come cheerfully to the scratch and try to put the shoe on."

"But et don't fit," said Burke, grimly. "Wal, but what of the woman, Madame Lenoir?"

"Here mystery on mystery's head accumulates. The madame is also my foe. Why? Because she is Chapman's friend, or more? She told me once that my safety depended on that of Chapman. Was this the truth or a studied lie? Here I am at fault.

"Mightily mixed," said Gaffer, helplessly.

"Next, it seems she is a friend of Idalah's father. Failing to move me by argument or threats, she went to Arnold's cabin and engineered the job which turned the tide against me. Why was Arnold so ready to aid her? I do not believe he has ever discovered it was I who twice was arrayed against him in fight. If this is true, why is he my enemy? And why did Madame Lenoir go to so humble a man as Arnold for an ally?"

"Hol' on! hol' on!" said Burke, with an air of desperation. "I can't guess these hyar riddles an' it ain't noways fair ter chuck 'em at me. They're enough ter make a hoss sour on his feed."

"Well, I am going to solve them," said Jake, sturdily.

"How?"

"I am going into Slashaway Bar in disguise and get at their secrets."

"In disguise?"

"Yes."

"Now, hol' on," said Gaffer. "This disguise business is right easy on a stage—I've see'd it done often, at St. Louis—but thar is more on it done in yarns than in real life, now you bet. Do you s'pose you could disguise yourself so that Drinkwater an' Hendrix couldn't recognize you? I reckon *not*!"

Jake smiled quietly.

"I'll bet I can disguise myself so that even you, warned of my purpose, cannot recognize me. To do it I shall put on a wig, darken my face so that it will appear deeply bronzed, while as for expression—"

He paused, and without throwing his features into any grotesque position so completely changed his general expression that Burke stared at him in utter wonder.

"Well, I'll be shot!" he muttered, with an expression much as though he was shot.

"What?" questioned Jake.

"Why, you don't look like ther same critter, at all."

"Therein lies the downfall of Drinkwater & Co. When I go to the Bar as Lem Rogers, the cowboy, the wool will grow over their eyes without pulling."

The following morning a muscular young fellow sauntered into Tim Ryan's saloon and walked straight to the bar.

"Give me some whisky with beads o' live coals all over ther top," he swaggeringly said. "I'm from whar men drink 'cause they like it an' frequently mix rattlesnakes an' ther like with ther p'izon afore they pour it down. Ef you want see life, pards, go ter ther cattle-ranges; that's whar they whoop 'em up an' don't mind ther sting o' bullets. I'm one o' ther sort, an' my name it are Lem Rogers—some calls me Lightning Lem."

While talking the self-styled cowboy had seemingly taken two big drinks of whisky, the way in which he closed his fingers around the glass hiding the fact that he had taken little more than a thimblefull.

This done he wheeled and faced the crowd, one elbow resting on the bar. Looking at him they believed they saw a man of about twenty-two. His long hair was a homely flaxen shade, his drooping mustache was almost white, while the bronze of his face was such as a cowboy ought to have. Add to this that he looked strong and fit to care for himself in any trouble, and we have the pen-picture of Lightning Lem.

Knowing him as we do to be Jake, the Jumper, we will say nothing had surprised Burke more than that by the disguise his young friend had seemed to increase his weight about fifty pounds.

"I'm a tough chap when ther harness chafes," he added, as the crowd looked in silence, "but use me well an' I never break a trot nur chuck my hoof over ther dash-board."

As no one seemed disposed to dispute this asserted fact, Lem looked highly pleased and asked the crowd to the bar. And thus he was introduced to the people who lived in the town.

Shortly after Tom Arnold entered the room, and it came to pass that the cowboy was introduced to him. Tom did not suspect his identity and they were soon on good terms, while by some means Lem conveyed the impression that he was a desperate character.

All this was an inducement for Arnold to talk and say something of importance, but though Lem furnished whisky freely, and Tom as freely made way with it, he did not show any disposition to betray valuable secrets. But he did, at last, invite Lem to his house. The invitation was not refused.

"I s'pose you're a man o' fam'ly," said the self-styled cowboy as they went.

"Durn o' a fam'ly hev I got. No; I'm a single man an' always was," Arnold replied. "Don't want no women nur whinin' youngsters 'round me."

"Do yer own cookin', I s'pose?"

"Yas, an' hev fur ten year."

The ease with which the fellow lied was admirable, if not pleasing to Jumping Jake.

"Was under ther impression somebody said 'twas your gal what runned away," stubbornly, but carelessly, said Lightning Lem.

"Ef I had one, I'd be glad ter hev her run away, but I ain't got none, an' don't s'pect ter have."

There was a touch of surly resentment in Arnold's voice which told that it would not do to press him further, and Lem let the matter drop.

They entered Arnold's cabin, sat down at the table, and began smoking. Lem looked curiously at the closet where he had once been confined and mistaken for a cat, but there had been a vast change since then. What would be the next turn of the tide he had no means of knowing.

Smoking had scarcely been begun, however, before there was a knock at the door. Arnold, without stirring, bade the applicant enter. The door swung back and revealed Madame Lenoir, Chapman's mysterious friend.

She entered promptly, but, seeing the other visitor, paused and looked at him keenly. Jumping Jake felt that the time was at hand for him to use all his shrewdness, and he clung to the facial expression he had assumed as Lightning Lem, from the cattle-range.

Madame Lenoir, plainly failing to penetrate his disguise, turned her gaze to Arnold.

"I want to see you privately," she said.

"Sart'in'; I'll step outside," Arnold replied.

"Not fur me," interrupted Lightning Lem. "I'm a tough an' a t'arer, but I know ther claims o' female kind. I'll step out an' air my heels, an' when you want me jest sound ther alarm."

And with a bow to Madame Lenoir, he went out. Before going, however, he had noticed that one of the windows was in a favorable condition for watching, and he turned that way.

One glance showed him that the madame had settled down to the table, and convinced that he was unsuspected, he applied his eyes to the small opening at his disposal.

"Well," said Madame Lenoir, abruptly, "what have you to report?"

"Nothin', in particular," Arnold replied.

"The woman struck the floor with her heel."

"Chapman won't be pleased with this report."

"Can't help it. If I had ther machinery o' Slash-

away Bar at my disposal I could cut a swath, but all I kin gamble on is my own muscle."

"Bah! I hate such agents as we have here. If Chapman and I were in charge, those young idiots would soon be found. The grave is waiting for them!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BRIAN DOONE WALKS IN.

JUMPING JAKE began to be interested and listened yet more eagerly.

"Wal, all you've got to do is ter ketch them," Arnold answered.

"Look you, Thomas Arnold, are you sure you do not know where they are?" Madame Lenoir demanded, leaning forward and looking at him sharply.

"I haven't a ghost o' an idee."

"Chapman suspects Brian Doone."

"O' what?"

"Treachery—double-dealing."

"Bless your stars, he ain't no cause to. Doone is ez squar' as ther rocks o' ther mountains. Ain't I knowed him fur years? You trust Brian Doone."

"I don't trust him."

"Oh, you don't, eh? Wal, that's as you pleases," Arnold surlily replied.

"Look you, sir, I know the reputation of Rockefeller. It is said to be a perfect Gibraltar. Men have let Doone alone because, even in numbers, they dared not try to storm his stronghold. Now is it likely any little party could go there and steal the girl?"

"It was luck an' cunnin'."

"Nonsense. You call Doone the sharpest man in Colorado, and have him thus overreached. Bah!"

"At any rate, he's no traitor," said Arnold, in a rage.

"Then let him find the girl and this Jumping Jake to make amends. *Mon Dieu!* it is strange how fate has sent them together; I don't understand it at all. Well, they shall die together, too."

"Why do you want to kill Idalah?"

"Because I hate her."

"A little while ago you was ez anxious fur her to live."

"Our plans have changed; the death of that woman makes all different. It is just as well as it is. We hoped to present her to the woman uneducated, rude, ill-bred and disgraceful. That's why we put her with you. What have you made her?"

"Nothin'," Arnold replied; "she hez made herself. You could no more keep her ignorant than you could Solomon. She picked up l'arnin' like sin, an' got as fine an' pert ez though she was schoolin' in New York. When I sent her ter wash my mining suit she said over ther subtraction table, an' she dropped on ribbins an' ther like ez nat'ral ez a hawk on a chicken."

"And the boy was the same," muttered Madame Lenoir. "Basil Hendrix has put every temptation in his way, and tried to make him ignorant, but he is fairly educated and a model of habits. Blood will tell—blood will tell!"

"Wonder ef it'd been so ef ther marryin' had been t'other way?" Arnold musingly inquired:

"*Mon Dieu!* how different!" the woman exclaimed. "Thomas Arnold, we are all children of fate. Circumstances can make, or unmake us. I was not evil as a girl. True, I was wild and thoughtless, but I would not have harmed a kitten. Then came my love for him; I lived in heaven for awhile, for I adored him, I adored him!"

She abruptly arose and began pacing the floor, while Arnold, awed for once, watched in silence.

And Jumping Jake watched, too, his heart in his mouth, as the saying goes. He was trembling on the verge of the mystery of his life; he had some dim suspicions of the main incidents; but names must be called and more said before it would avail him anything. The coupling of Idalah's name with

his own had served to confuse him afresh and he knew not what to think.

Only a few turns did Madame Lenoir take, and then returned to the table and sat down, her face as composed as usual.

"I am a fool," she icily said. "I do not know, Arnold, why I have talked thus to you, but you and Brian Doone know as much as I. Now, to business! Chapman offers a hundred dollars each for the capture of this Jumping Jake and Idalah. You and Doone are the men to win it."

"I'm afeerd Doone ain't ter be controlled. He has been king o' Rockefeller so long that he's got that cranky you must be well up in coaxin' or you can't manage him no more'n a mule. An' he's jest howlin' fur gore 'cause ther sheriff o' Slashaway Bar dared put his nose inter *his* town; an' he swars he'll clean out the Bar, Brian do."

"He will be a fool if he tries it," she harshly answered. "Tell him so from me. Tell him, too, that if he will find these precious runaways he shall be well paid. Will you do it?"

"Yes; an' I'll go fur ther cash, myself."

"Do so, and use energy. Remember that Chapman cannot appear in the case, himself; that we do not trust Drinkwater or Hendrix any too much; and that Judge Kerrigan is only a tool won over by a show of money. We depend on you, Arnold."

The man declared that her trust was not misplaced, and then Madame Lenoir arose to go. When she stepped from the door Lightning Lem, the cowboy, was a dozen yards away, apparently fast asleep on the grass with his extinguished pipe lying beside him.

Arnold called him in when she was gone.

"You look like a chap o' speerit," he observed.

"Whar I come from we drink rattlesnakes right alive in our whisky ter counteract snakes in ther boots," Lem modestly stated. "I've made many a breakfast on bowie-knives with ther blade baked jest ter a delicate brown."

"How are ye on a trail?"

"Kin see a foot-print on a solid rock, five foot in diameter, by lookin' through from ther opp'site side."

"You'll do," said Tom, admiringly. "Wal, do ye want ter 'arn a few dollars?"

Lightning Lem considered the matter and then said he did, "Ef there was a chance fur fun in the game."

And thus it came about that Jumping Jake found himself engaged to hunt himself down—for Arnold frankly said he wished to find certain parties and would pay well for the services of a skillful trailer, such as Lem claimed to be.

It was too late for work that afternoon, so the two soon separated, agreeing to meet in the evening at Tim Ryan's hotel. Jake left the cabin, found Sheriff Burke and made his report.

"I mean to work Arnold," he added. "He is close-mouthed, but proper eloquence will bring him over; I feel sure of it. In the meanwhile, there is another point for gain. We need influential men on our side, don't we?"

"Should say we do," Burke acknowledged.

"Very well. Now, there is Tom Arnold's plot against the gold of Savage & Morgan. I have done nothing about that, yet, but it strikes me the time has come. Suppose you walk in on them and give them the story, not forgetting due credit to me?"

Burke voted the idea a good one and agreed to carry it out. Then they separated. Jake went to the cave, found all right there and told Idalah of the talk between Arnold and Madame Lenoir.

Both were perplexed by what he had overheard, but Idalah readily accepted Jake's view that she was not the daughter of Arnold. According to their opinion, she had been stolen by Madame Lenoir and given to Arnold to rear in poverty and ignorance so as to make her unworthy of her real parents.

But the way in which their—Jake's and Idalah's—games had been associated puzzled both.

"Still," said Jake, "I will be frank enough to say it has occurred to me that we may be brother and sister."

Curiously enough, Idalah's face sobered at the thought and Jake found himself sorrowfully wondering if she was reluctant to regard him as a brother, forgetting that a little before he had been silently hoping she was not his sister.

His reason was that he thought he would prefer her in another relationship, and he forgot that she might think the same way.

His stay at the cave was not a long one, for he had to get around to meet Arnold at Ryan's saloon, and he wanted to work the fellow to all possible advantage.

When he arrived at the saloon he found himself ahead of Tom, however, and sat down to await his coming.

Not long had he been in place when a powerfully-built man walked up to the bar and called for liquor. The sound of his voice made Jake start, and as he took a good look he recognized him.

It was Brian Doone!

The youth was amazed to see the outlaw in Slashaway Bar, and undisguised. Almost every man there hated him, and while they would not have dared to meet him single-handed, or to beard him in his den, nothing would please them better than to fight him in their own town, with the odds largely in their favor.

He drank his liquor and turned away, but Tim politely hinted that he had forgotten something.

"What's that?" Doone asked, in a loud voice.

"Whisky costs two bits in Slashaway Bar."

"What's that ter me?"

"Nothing, except that ye owe me fur dhe drink."

"I sha'n't pay," Doone coolly said.

"Ye won't?"

"No!"

"Thin, be me loife, out yez go on dhe sharp eend av yer nose!"

"Ther man don't wear boots in Colorado that kin put me out," said the outlaw, in a still louder voice.

"Do you want ter try it?"

"By dhe howly poker, I will!" cried Tim, leaping over the bar like a cat.

Quick and strong was he, with a knowledge of boxing and wrestling; but as he made for Brian Doone he was seized, tossed in the air like a ball, and then planted on the floor, with the outlaw's foot in the small of his back.

"Here lies ther body o' Tim Ryan, publican an' sinner!" said his conqueror, addressing the crowd; "an' here stand I ter tackle ther next man over ther fence. Maybe you hev heerd on me—my name is Brian Doone!"

CHAPTER XV.

SLASHAWAY BAR GETS TAKEN BY THE THROAT.

SILENCE, utter and suggestive, reigned for awhile in the room. If the men of Slashaway Bar had been blind before their eyes were by this time fully opened. Many of them had seen Brian Doone before, in one way or another, and when he had introduced himself they did not need any proof of his identity.

Many of them in days that were gone had intimated that they would be glad to meet the Rockefeller chief in fight, but it was noticeable that none now leaped forward to improve the chance.

"I've come ter town," resumed Doone, after a pause, "an' ef thar's a man hyar in boots that wants ter tackle me, let him fling ther harness over my back."

A grim veteran near Jumping Jake glanced about the room and then whispered to a neighbor:

"There's a pile o' strangers hyar: ez I figure it, Doone has brought his men along."

And Slashaway Bar held its peace.

"Whar is ther tailor who wants ter fit a coat ter me?" resumed the outlaw, his terrible eyes rolling from side to side, and Tim Ryan now lying like a peaceful lamb under his heel. "If there is one o'

ther sort in sound o' my whisper, let him come an' see me."

But the bold men of the Bar did not stir.

"Up whar ther eagle builds his nest an' ther mountain goat skips from crag ter crag," Brian Doone went on, with a burst of eloquence, "thar is a town called Rockafeller. You ones say you want ter tackle ther king o' ther town. Wal, hyar he is, an' he's waitin' ter be tackled. Who chips in? What, nobody? Then hear my edict. I've come ter town ter look fer one Burke, a sheriff, 'cordin' ter my swear that I will kill him. Trot out Gaff Burke an' let me t'ar off his spurs."

"Don't get homesick, fur hyar I are with my hand on ther plow!"

The words came from the door, and Burke strode forward serenely and faced the king of Rockafeller.

The spectators hardly breathed, but from that day Gaff Burke would be a hero at the Bar; it was eighteen-carat gold to face Brian Doone, and if Burke died at his hands he would get a monument from his grateful neighbors—in their memory.

A look of grim satisfaction crossed Doone's face.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "I'm glad ter see you. Seein' me hyar you may diskiver I am not bashful ter keep my oath; I've sought ye in your very stronghold."

"Come with me an' I'll lock ye up," Burke observed. "Ther jail is waitin'."

"It'll keep on waitin' a long time. Ther man don't live that kin take me thar."

"Ther man lives that'll try durned hard. My hand is on ther plow an' I ginerally turn a clean fur-rer."

The men faced each other with grim determination, but neither showed a disposition to draw a weapon. Without a word being spoken to that effect they seemed to mutually agree that muscle and skill should decide the question.

So far as size went they were not badly matched, but Brian Doone had such a reputation that it was commonly believed he was more than a match for any two men on Sawtooth Divide.

He removed his foot from Ryan's back, allowing him to scramble up and get behind the bar, and then the rivals began operations. It was evidently to be catch-as-catch-can, and they began circling around and looking for an opening.

The crowd, residents and strangers, made a regular ring and watched the result.

Brian Doone, however, in the pride of his confidence, was not disposed to grant much delay. Burke saw a twinkle appear in his eyes, and then with a sudden and agile bound, he leaped forward, his hands extended for a clutch.

Burke did not seek to avoid it, and with a shock like the collision of battling buffaloes, the strong men met. For a moment they were mixed up and the result was uncertain, but as, with their holds assured, they paused one second for the great effort, it was seen that neither had the advantage.

As fairly as though for a friendly wrestle they were bound together, bonds of steel in the shape of their brawny arms holding them in place.

Another moment and they were whirling about in a desperate grapple, arm to arm, shoulder to shoulder, and hip to hip.

No one in the room was more interested than Jumping Jake. He had mounted a table to look over the heads of those who formed the inner ring, and Burke had an earnest sympathizer in him.

It was difficult to comprehend just how matters were situated, so rapidly did they whirl about, but as it was not a wrestle for gate-money it was not likely to last a great while.

Back and forth struggled the men, and the crowd shouted to see how well they were matched. They could not withhold their admiration, even though it was a struggle on which so much depended.

Jake watched eagerly for the result, and, all things considered, he began to hope that Burke, having a

longer wind than his rival, was going to win in the end.

But the end was delayed, and they struggled on like gladiators, their faces red and perspiration-covered.

Gaffer Burke, however, was preparing for a grand effort. Uncertain at the first, he had gained confidence as the struggle went on, and believed he would yet place Brian Doone on his back. Already he imagined himself turning the key on the noted outlaw.

Suddenly he put forth all his reserve power. He moved with startling rapidity. Doone's bones seemed to bend under his crushing hold. He whirled the outlaw about like a flash. No one could follow their movements. All was confusion and uncertainty.

Then followed a crash that made the bottles dance behind the bar, and the king of Rockafeller lay flat on his back with Burke's foot on his breast.

"Stand back an' give him air!" cried the sheriff, with pardonable triumph.

But Jumping Jake, from his perch on the table, saw one of the strangers present a revolver to the back of the sheriff's head. The act needed no explanation. As had been said by the veteran, Doone had brought some of his men along with him, and, their chief being down, they meant to end the battle by recourse to revolver and knife.

Jake saw his friend's danger and knew the weapon was up to kill. There was no time to press through the crowd and arrest the shot, but the young acrobat knew a better way.

With a long light leap, he went over the heads of the nearest men and alighted like a panther on the outlaw's shoulders. The revolver went flying away, harmlessly discharging itself, and Jake and his novel steed fell to the floor together.

He had saved Burke's life, but the incident was enough to stir up the smoldering fire. Doone's men were there for mischief and the Barites knew it; and the single shot was the signal for the affray.

The outlaws turned like tigers on the miners. Each selected a man and tried to make him a victim. A fierce blow was aimed at Burke, but he warded it off, and knocked the fellow senseless. Revolvers cracked and bowies hissed as steel met steel, and Tim Ryan began hurling empty bottles at every stranger he saw, with surprising accuracy.

Jumping Jake was still on the floor. His man had turned on him like a tiger and they were in a grapple. It was not a fair one; the odds of age and weight were against him and he only held his own by his agility in gliding from each hold the outlaw gained.

And while they rolled about more than one foot was planted momentarily upon them.

Confusion reigned in the saloon, and, if they but knew it, confusion reigned elsewhere.

The outburst inside was apparently the signal for a general attack on the town. Armed men sprung up as though from the ground. Houses were attacked and robbed. Stores were cleaned out systematically. And the hand of the destroyer was heavy on Slashaway Bar.

It so happened that the only persons in the circus shanty were Hebe, the Fat Woman, and the Living Skeleton. Aroused by the noise, they did not at first comprehend what was afoot, but the active mind of L. S. was not long to be deceived.

He went to the interior of the shanty and brought out his sword—a gift from Jules Lajeunesse, the celebrated French fencing-master.

"You had better go back to your quarters, Mrs. Hebe," said L. S., a warlike light in his eyes.

"Otherwise you may see desperate work."

"What are you going to do, L. S.?" the Fat Woman anxiously asked.

"Defend our altars and our fires," he valiantly replied. "The red-handed foe is at our gate, but, by

St. Jago! they will find that I stand here even as Horatio kept the bridge."

He got as near the accuracy of history as people usually do and looked like a lion—in a mummy's skin.

But Hebe was not disposed to humor his heroic mood.

"You sha'n't do it, L. S.!" she declared; and then, as a man was seen running toward the shanty, she lifted the would-be warrior in her arms and bore him away from the door.

"There, you stay here, L. S.; I'm not going to have you hurt," she said, and, placing him in a chair, she seized the sword and rushed back to the entrance as fast as her pounds avoirdupois would allow.

But L. S. was there as soon as she and he wrenched the sword skillfully away in turn.

"Back!" he said, tragically. "Do not unman me by womanly tears. Rather, pray that the victory may be to the Right, and that power may be in my single arm. Away, or, by St. Jago! I'll do thee harm!"

CHAPTER XVI

A "COLD DAY" FOR THE CIRCUS.

THE Living Skeleton endeavored to look very fierce, but the Fat Woman was not to be thus intimidated. She had a warm, personal interest in his welfare and, knowing she could worst half a dozen like him without inconvenience, she resolved that his desperate valor should not bring him to grief.

Again she raised him in her arms and bore him to a chair inside the shanty.

"Woman, unhand me!" he cried, vainly struggling. "This abuse puts the Dark Ages to the blush. Would you have me degraded, dishonored? My place is at the front. Give me my good sword and let me at the foe!"

"You just keep still!" Hebe replied. "You'll work yourself into a fever and then have to take peppermint tea and have a plaster on your back. Keep still, or—"

She paused as the door of the shanty was dashed open and several men entered. They reclosed the door with a bang and put up the bars, and then revolvers and knives flashed in the dim light. A heavy crash followed, showing that other men had huddled themselves against the door.

It stood firm, however.

"Goodness gracious!" muttered Hebe, "them is the rioters."

"Can you see now what you have done, woman?" L. S. sternly demanded. "But for you no foreign foe would have been on our soil; they would have found their graves at our door. Give me the sword and, by St. Jago, I'll cleave them in twain!"

He arose like an old-time hero going to battle, but again the Fat Woman raised him bodily and bore him further away.

The notice of the strangers had been attracted, and, as two of them approached, the sight was so comical that they burst into loud laughter.

"Take him across your knee, ole lady!" advised one.

"Won't he hev his hair combed?"

"Put him to bed!"

These jeering remarks so excited L. S. that he made a great effort and escaped from Hebe's hold. Then, seizing his sword, he made for the men with hot haste.

Their laughter increased, and, as he came near, one of them made a sudden kick in air which caught L. S.'s sword and, proving too much for his strength, spun him around like a top for a moment and then dropped him on the floor.

The blood of the Fat Woman fired at the outrage and she caught up a broom and sailed down upon them like a heavy ship. They saw her coming and, so large was she, saw nothing else except that danger was abroad.

And as one man they took to flight.

But the avenger was on their track.

There was a sweep of the broom and one of the fellows uttered a howl; a second sweep and his companion joined in the chorus. The Fat Woman, like the colored troops, fought nobly, but the superior agility of the pursued took them out of the way.

By this time there was a tremendous racket at the door. It seemed that the strange men were of Doone's band and that they had been driven to this shelter by the Barites.

And by the shouting outside one would easily believe all the citizens were out.

The outlaws were not blind to the danger and they held a council. The result was soon seen. Leaving the door to care for itself—it had been barricaded as far as possible—they fell on the circus goods and began to destroy indiscriminately.

With axes they smashed everything that could be smashed, and the various animals were killed in their cages—all except the two Bengal tigers we have before seen. These raged in their cage and roared so that the Rockefeller men saw fit to give them a wide berth.

But of all the circus goods they alone remained; they and the human beings. It had been no more than a wanton destruction, but when they turned their gaze on Hebe and L. S. the latter pair began to feel uneasy.

"Shoot 'em!" said one man.

"Tie them up an' chuck 'em in the tigers' den," said another.

"Set fire ter ther shanty an' burn 'em!"

"But that'll burn us too."

"We hev got ter come ter ther scratch sooner or later. Why not fire ther shanty an' then make a rush?"

The idea was voted good, and the place was fired in half a dozen places.

In the mean while, the people outside were getting angry because they could not enter. Some of their number had gone for axes with which to beat down the door, but the axes did not appear and they were getting impatient.

Fighting still raged through the village, but the strife was going against Brian Doone, and the Barites wished to capture the fragment of his band they had cornered in the shanty.

With an ax they could easily have entered; without it the style of the place rather put them at fault.

Suddenly some one ran up with a ladder on his shoulders, and the men recognized Lightning Lem, the cowboy.

"We must take them from the roof and lose no time!" said Jake, anxiously, and forgetting his dialect. "There's a man and woman in there, unless they are murdered already. At any rate, let us go to the rescue. We can enter at the roof."

"Who wants ter put his head whar it'll be blowed off?" one man cautiously asked. "Them outlaws shoot straight."

His words produced an impression, but aid was given Jake to raise the ladder. As he ran up the crowd had two things to say. First, there was smoke in the air, indicating that the shanty had been fired; secondly, Lightning Lem would get his last hurt if he tried his chosen way of entering.

But Jake, knowing Hebe and L. S. must be there, did not hesitate. He reached the roof, and tore away the covering. A cloud of smoke rushed up and nearly blinded him. Perhaps, too, it saved his life, for the bullet which arose through the smoke went wild, indicating that a poor chance for aim had been given the outlaws.

The Jumper's blood was up. He knew his circus friends were in desperate danger; but he did not know exactly how to help them. Even if he had found men ready to follow him in a leap down the interior of the shanty, it was a leap even he did not care to take, and the smoke gave him no chance to take aim at the outlaws.

While he hesitated it arose more thickly around him. A voice shouted to him to descend, but he was bitter against the man who would not follow in such a cause, and he kept his place.

Suddenly, however, the roof seemed to sway under him, and before he could retreat, it gave way entirely for a space of four feet around him, and he went shooting down, whether he wished or not.

Taken by surprise, he tried in vain to get his balance so as to strike favorably; it was clear he must alight as chance would have it.

He passed the cloud of smoke as he went lower, and his gaze rested on an outlaw, but before he could see more he struck the fellow squarely on the shoulders, and both went down together.

Only one arose; Jake came up unharmed.

The interior of the shanty was an unprepossessing place just then. The flames licked the walls, and smoke was thick, and in places stifling.

The outlaws stood near the door, their teeth set, and their weapons out, prepared for the rush they knew must come. The fat woman had put L. S. into a corner, and was covering him with her ample person, her broom still held firmly.

Something—it may have been pity or admiration—had caused the outlaws to spare them.

And the roaring of the Bengal tigers was enough to chill even stout hearts.

Before Jake could decide what to do a crashing sounded at the door. It needed no explanation: the axes had been found and it would not be long before the fort would be stormed.

Crash! crash! crash!

Blows sounded in rapid succession and the red light of the burning building sent out brighter gleams when the light glanced back from the ax-blades that cut through the door.

Jumping Jake waited. Matters were well enough as they were without help from him if the door went down quickly.

But the roars of the tigers suddenly changed inflection and the youth looked to see them rushing from the smoke. They had broken from their cages. As they leaped forward their roars were blood-curdling and, for once, Jumping Jake felt weak in his boots. He knew the fierce brutes of old, and even if they had been subject to the will of man they could not have been controlled under the existing circumstances.

The fire had driven them mad.

The outlaws had not been deaf to the renewed roaring, and they turned to see the beasts rushing toward them. Their resolution was taken in a moment. Casting off the bar from the door they darted out. Better by far the men of Slashaway Bar than the untamed tigers.

As they went two lithe, striped bodies shot out of the door and the shanty was cleared of all hostile elements. Jumping Jake moved forward just as the Fat Woman hurried toward the door with L. S. in her arms.

"I'm afraid he's gone; the smoke has stifled him," she anxiously said.

"No, by St. Jago, no!" whispered L. S. "Give me my sword and I'll carve my bigness in the foe ten times over."

Nothing could blunt the edge of his courage.

The trio emerged from the shanty. No one was in sight. The tigers had cleared the field of the rival elements and their roaring away at the northwest proved they were making for the hills. The Jumper paused to deliberate.

The shanty was doomed; that much was sure. Wrapped as it was in the grasp of the flames nothing could save it. The circus was doomed; to it had come at once a hot night and a "cold day."

While Jake still hesitated three persons appeared on the scene—Chapman, Madame Lenoir and a stout unknown ruffian.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARD PRESSED.

THE coming of his enemies did not fill Jake, the Jumper, with any feeling of dismay. It was true he was outnumbered and the faces of the trio, if nothing more, expressed their enmity, but he was not reluctant to speak with Chapman and he had learned the way of that part of Colorado pretty well.

It was each man for himself, and it would be a foolish fellow who didn't play a trump card to meet a trump.

"Surround him!" exclaimed Chapman; "don't let him escape!"

"Hold on there, my Moses in the bulrushes," said Jake, promptly. "If there's any surrounding to be done I claim the first act. Stay where you are or—Easy, there, and hands up; I have you covered!"

It was a fact, for as his enemies began closing in, with their hands at their belts, he snatched out his own Smith & Wessons and covered Chapman and his male ally.

And Hebe, the Fat Woman, catching sight of her broom, which had somehow got outside the shanty, deserted L. S. and faced Madame Lenoir with the broom well up.

"Hould on, dhere, ye painted-up cr'ature!" she cried, breaking into a long-buried brogue in her excitement. "Sthand where yez are, or I'll swape ye ter Cork if yez tech a hair av dhe b'ye!"

"By St. Jago, yes!" added the Living Skeleton, arising. "I'll cleave you from skull to stomach if I but draw my good blade!"

Chapman was wise enough to look with respect on the revolvers, if not on the broom, and he paused and looked for help. The light of the shanty made all plain and distinct, while distant yells told that Slashaway Bar was getting its fill of wild adventure.

"Now let us talk sense," said Jumping Jake, sternly. "You have shown yourself my enemy. Very good; I don't care a cent for that; but I ask it as a favor and a right that you tell me what corn the shoe pinches. Why do you hate me? Come, and show your hand!"

"I'll show it before we are through," the man declared, angrily. "I've marked you for death, you impertinent rascal, and I'll see that the game goes through. I've waited for this time for years."

"What harm have I done you?"

"The harm came in before you were born. Remember the good old Bible rule that the children shall suffer for the sins of their parents. That's all the explanation you'll ever get; I swear it."

"You look like a hard swearer, but you can't come in. Well, it seems the mask is off at last. You have sworn right along while setting your tools on me that you have no spite at heart, but you've found slippery ice, and showed the bottom of your feet. One thing more; you have now found one particular child who don't propose to suffer for the sins of his parents unless another judge than you says so."

"An' by dhe powers, I'll lay dhis sthick over dhe back av dhe first divil among yez that teches dhe b'ye!" Hebe clearly announced.

"Bob," said Chapman, in a rage, turning to his ruffian, "wade in and clean them out."

"You go an' git ther young tough's shooters first," the fellow replied.

"Bah! you're afraid."

"I am a bit skeery o' rushing bull-headed on them sizes with two glintin' eyes like ther kid's ahind them," was the frank reply. "Ther boy is chock-up with grit an' fight. But, look here, ole silk-an'-satin, ef you thinks I'm a coward, I'll agree ter leap ont'er you like a fly on a quartered beef!"

What would have come of this mutiny is uncertain, for at this moment several of the men of the Bar appeared in sight, with Judge Kerrigan at their head.

Chapman hailed the official and pointed to Jake. We should have mentioned before that enough of his disguise had been lost in the burning building to make his identity clear.

"Here's Campani, the young outlaw," announced the tall man. "He came out of the building with Brian Doone's men, and there can be no doubt but he is one of them. You know your duty, judge."

"Yes, and I'll do it; the majesty of the law must be vindictiveated," said Kerrigan, with his usual happy choice of words. "Surround him, men, and see that he don't escape. Close in!"

A defiant smile crossed the Jumper's face. He had no notion of being captured, and did not believe all Slashaway Bar could seize him with a clear field at his back.

He wheeled and then stood dumfounded.

Another force of men had appeared at his rear, and he was already surrounded.

"Seize him!" shouted Chapman. "He is the man who set this fire, and he is Brian Doone's right-hand man. Take him, dead or alive!"

Jumping Jake looked keenly about him. Neither Sheriff Burke nor one of his humbler friends was in sight. His only backing was the Living Skeleton and Fat Woman. Yet, he was far from being reconciled to surrender. He knew he was persecuted, not prosecuted, and he resolved to no longer submit.

Twenty men were about him, but he had no thought of yielding. Instead, he gave all his attention to escape.

One keen glance he took and then, with the speed of a young deer, he rushed at the weakest point in his assailants' line.

"Don't fire; take him alive!" ordered Chapman.

The miners prepared to receive and seize him, honest enough in their belief that he was a desperate character; but what followed dumfounded them.

Almost to the hands of the nearest man Jumping Jake ran at full speed, but just as the fellow thought to grasp him, the young acrobat arose in the air with a great bound, the like of which was never before seen in Slashaway Bar, and sailed over his head like a bird upon the wing.

And then, never losing his balance, he dashed away toward the hills.

Silence, deep and profound, reigned for a moment; no one had thought of this possibility, and all were astonished. Then Chapman recovered his presence of mind.

"Pursue! pursue!" he shouted. "Fifty dollars to the man who captures him!"

But not a man stirred. The Jumper was already vanishing in the darkness, and with the hills, with their gulches, caves and pockets before him, it was folly to pursue that night. And they said as much.

Chapman was furious, and in his wrath he fearfully began a solitary pursuit himself.

Madame Lenoir came to him with her face moving convulsively.

"Do you call yourselves men?" she demanded.

"How many are needed to take one beardless boy? By my life, I am tempted to put on male garments and take the trail myself, and alone."

"Ef you didn't make a better-looking man nix you are a woman, you'd scare ther birds dead," said an ungallant voice from the crowd.

But the madame did not heed it.

"Is there nothing can be done?" she asked, as Chapman remained sullenly silent.

"I hev a dorg," said the ruffian, "what kin foller a trail in air or on water. Pay me a X fur him, ter guard against possible death by lead, an' I'll agree ter hunt down yer Jumpin' Jacopo afore ter-morrer's sun is middle-aged."

"So be it," said Chapman, quickly. "See to the dog, and get ready to start. The young demon must be hunted down, dead or alive!"

If Chapman had been wise he would not have

made that remark. As has been said, the majority of the people of Slashaway Bar were well meaning, and had been misled in the game, and this class was set to thinking by the last words.

Chapman had professed to have no spite against the boy acrobat, and Kerrigan was the man who run the Bar; why, then, was Chapman putting up his money for a capture, *dead or alive*?

The slip of his tongue set the miners to thinking, and sober thought usually bears good fruit.

While they were talking the matter over, Sheriff Burke appeared. He had a handkerchief tied around one temple, and sundry abrasions on other parts of his face suggested that a roll of court-plaster would come in handily; he looked like a man who had taken his turn as a ten-pin in an alley, and got knocked down and badly stepped on.

"Hev any on you see'd a small outlaw, o' about a hundred an' ninety pounds avo'dupus?" he questioned. "I'm lookin' fur Brian Doone."

"You look as though you'd found him," laughed a man.

"You ought ter see ther other feller," Burke placidly remarked. "Wal, boyees, ye all know what happened at Tim Ryan's hotel, so far ez I'm consarned, but you don't know Brian Doone an' me hev been fightin' right along reg'lar ever sence. We've fit over every inch o' ground from hyar ter Rockafeller, and bled ev'rything from ther r'ale article ter teeth an' toe-nails. Our last expl'ite was ter fall over a precipice seven hundred feet from top ter bottom. Took me three quarters o' an hour ter fall, an' I see'd a panorama on ther way. Knocked ther ground senseless whar I struck. But whar's Brian Doone?"

No one could tell him.

"Wal, I'm goin' arter him ter-morrer. I've put my hand ter ther plow, an' I'll find him or bu'st. Boyees, I want ye at ther first glint o' day."

And they agreed to follow where he led.

But, as soon as it was fairly light, another party left the Bar. In this crowd were Chapman, Kerrigan and Drinkwater, and Madame Lenoir wished them good luck when they left.

At the head of all was a sleek, lank hound, which Bob Stiver held in with a string, and which they hoped would follow relentlessly on the trail of Jumping Jake and hunt him down.

Had their purpose been known to Hamed or Yusef, there would have been a dead dog at hand, but these two honest men had fared rather badly the night before, and were taking their rest.

And the hound led the way along the gulches with the unfailing sagacity of his breed, along where Jake had gone and to the vicinity of the cave.

He paused at last at a heap of stones, and called sharply for their attention, looking at the pile.

"Lead the fool on; he scents a mouse," said Chapman.

"Fool yourself!" retorted Bob Stiver. "I tell you Death-Mouth makes no mistake. Pull aside them dornicks, you fellers, an' I'll show you ther hole whar Jumping Jake has hived. My dog knows what his bread is buttered for."

After that they could not doubt. The rocks were pulled aside, and sure enough there was an opening in the earth.

This mode of concealing it had been suggested by Burke after he took his young friends inside, and it would have proved sufficient had it not been for the dog.

"Here we are," said Chapman, a little uneasily. "Now who wants to take a ten-dollar note and go first?"

"I'm that galoot," Stiver promptly answered.

And thus they invaded the cave.

Inside, Jake the Jumper, Idalah, Kitty O'Neil and Weasel Jim were just having breakfast. The former had reached the cave without mishap, and get-

ting a little sleep before day, had come out of the press in far better condition than was to be expected.

He was only anxious to see Gaffer Burke and get details from the village, but he put all anxiety aside and laughed and jested with the girls.

But Weasel Jim had not been named without a thought. He was a small boy, but he had a big head. And it being his fashion to always keep wide awake, he did not sit down like a stone in the cave. Half a dozen times during the night he had gone to the cave entrance to see that no one was getting in; and now, taking a slice of the bread and a piece of meat in his hand, he walked away on the same errand, trying to imagine how hungry he would have been if Gaffer Burke had brought in no food.

He had not reached the entrance, however, when the sharp yelp of a hound reached his ears, followed by an angry command in a man's voice.

Weasel Jim was sure this was not Burke, and in hot haste he turned and fled toward his companions.

"They are trailin' us with a dog!" was his startling announcement.

Idalah grew pale, Kitty shrieked, and Jake sprung to his feet and caught up his rifle.

"Who?" he tersely demanded.

"Chapman," Weasel Jim replied, at a venture.

"I'll stop the dog."

With these words the Jumper ran toward the entrance at full speed. He knew the dog was worse than ten men. The cave was a wonderfully spacious affair, with nooks and corners of every description and it would be no easy matter for men to find them if they hid. But the dog's scent could not be deceived.

The youth had not gone far when he saw a glimmer of light. The enemy had fired some pine-knots after nearly falling into a chasm, and this was a sure tell-tale.

By the light Jake soon made them out. He saw the dog, with the big ruffian leading him, and he saw Chapman and Kerrigan close behind.

There was no doubt as to the complexion of the party.

He had been clearly shown that he must shoot the dog, but how was he to take aim? All was darkness where he stood and the sights of his rifle invisible.

As though in answer to his question came the voice of Weasel Jim. Jake turned. The small boy had a torch which he had hid, partially, behind his hat. Its light was a godsend.

And Jake knelt, and, with the torch-light on his gun, aimed for the shot on which so much depended.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH CLOSSES THE REGISTER.

It is necessary that we go back in our narrative for a few hours and record an incident of the previous night which has a bearing on our story.

When Sheriff Burke told Savage & Morgan of the plot which had been laid to rob them of their gold, he did it with the understanding that the fact should be kept quiet for awhile; and the firm readily agreed, having a desire to catch the robbers in the act.

They had been somewhat surprised to learn that their trusted watchman, Big Bill Benner, was a rascal and leagued with other rascals to rob them, but he was not the first trusted employee to go wrong, and they swallowed the fact as well as possible.

When the tumult began in town that night, and they knew Brian Doone's men had made a raid, Savage & Morgan, being resolute men, prepared to defend their property. Stuffing their pockets full of revolvers, they went out on a lean-to and sat down where they had a good view, but where they were themselves in the shadow.

That they were practically invisible was shown by the fact that Benner did not see them. Their first thought was to notify him they were there, as he

was in easy sound of their voices, but it occurred to them to watch him.

Big Bill marched about the yard like a soldier on his beat and seemed little concerned by the firing.

Half an hour passed.

Then there was a knock at the gate.

Big Bill paused and listened. The knock was repeated, and that, too, in a peculiar way. He went to the gate, spoke, and was answered, and then he opened it and two men came in.

The partners touched each other on the arm; it was a positive order from them that the gate should never be opened after dark until sunrise. But they said nothing; they listened.

"Is ther coast cl'ar?" asked a subdued voice.

"Seems ter be," replied Benner.

"Then let us talk. Ritter an' me hez an idee."

"What is it?"

"Why, that thar will never be a better chance than now to carry off Savage & Morgan's gold-dust.

Thar is a big row in ther hull village; Brian Doone hez stepped in; an' I reckon we kin slide ther gold out while ther rest is a-fightin'. Thar is hosses in ther stable, ain't ther?"

"Three on 'em."

"Jest one apiece. Wal, let's crack ther crib while ther excitement runs high, load up ther hosses an' git up an' dust, never to return."

"I reckon Arnold is right," said Ritter. "Once I had thoughts of marrying his daughter, but it seems she isn't his daughter, and I, for one, don't like the way things are going here. If I stay I shall get into a worse muss than I did in New York City."

"There's no vote from me ag'inst ther plan," Benner said. "Come along, soft an' creepin', an' we'll be rich men in half an hour."

He led the way to the stable, the horses were prepared, and tools secured for forcing the door of the place where Savage & Morgan's gold was stored.

This door was within a few feet of the watching partners, and they cocked their revolvers and prepared for work. The Western man has little sympathy for such criminals, and they intended to give them a baptism of lead.

The burglars advanced to the door and, while Benner held a bull's-eye, Arnold, who had operated—and served time—as a cracksman, undertook to pick the lock.

Ritter was close behind him.

About thirty seconds was given them and then the river leaped her banks.

Crack! crack!

Four times in succession their revolvers rung out and then the mine-owners leaped from the lean-to. There was no need of further firing. One robber lay silently on the ground, a second was howling with pain, while the third dropped on his knees and begged for mercy.

This was Benner, and Ritter had a broken arm. They thought, at first, that Tom Arnold was dead, but when they looked closer they found him just living, though within half an hour of eternity.

The robbery had failed.

For a year Jumping Jake had been carefully practicing as a workman, both for trick-shots and the regular kind, so that he had become skillful; but never before had he taken the pains that he did when he glanced along his rifle with the hound as the object of his aim.

Weasel Jim held the light with a steady hand, and if the advancing party saw it they gave no sign.

And the Jumper, having taken all the aim he desired, pulled the trigger at last.

The report rung out almost like thunder in the cave. The rifle had barely spoken when Weasel Jim cast his torch aside so there could be no return shot. And then both saw the hound leap into the air and fall dead at the feet of his master.

Bob Stiver had lost his dog as he had expected.

Jake and Jim ran backward at full speed, and they could hear the pursuers in their rear. Luckily,

however, the way was one much easier followed by those who knew it than by strangers and the boys perceptibly gained.

They found Idalah and Kitty awaiting them with a good deal of fear.

"Follow me!" said Jake, cheerfully. "Jim has looked around here until he knows every crook and turn, and it'll be a wonder if those fellows get us."

Led by Weasel Jim they deserted their lunching-place and went where it seemed as though a race of giants had amused themselves by pitching huge boulders together in a hap-hazard way. These lay about, here and there, upon top of each other and in almost every way, and the number of passages and nooks between was indeed wonderful.

Before these were reached the pursuers were off the track and our young friends had ample time to select such a hiding-place as they saw fit.

"Now," said Jake, "it will soon become a sort of hide-and-seek matter. Of course they can't track us on the solid rock, and they no longer have a dog. In course of time, having their torches, they will happen on this place and suspect we are concealed here. Then they have two things to do—first, to find us; secondly, to capture us. And we mean to fight, if necessary."

"But they will conquer sooner or later."

"Who knows but Sheriff Burke may not happen along? He is our good friend and I have confidence in him. Let us hope for the best."

They did keep their spirits up wonderfully, and even when the searchers came quite near and the light of their torches revealed their brawny forms, Idalah laid a steady hand on Jake's own.

"Have no fear for me," she said, with heroic courage.

And Jake the Jumper, as cool as ever, brought his pistol around as he saw Chapman and heard him urge his men on with relentless hate, and had the young acrobat not been resolved to shed no human blood unless driven to the wall it would have fared ill with Chapman that day.

Suddenly there was a roar from among the rocks, and Chapman recoiled against Stiver. Twice the echo was repeated, and Jake, looking in amazement, knew it was the muffled report of a revolver, but could not imagine who held it.

A revolver flash of light arose from a hole in the rocks, but the marksman and the weapon were not to be seen. But the execution was plain and disastrous.

Chapman, Stiver and another man were down, and momentary confusion reigned among the party.

But Drinkwater, never suspecting it was another hand than Jake's that sped the bullets, aroused and shouted a furious command.

"Forward, all! Shoot the demons—remember the order is, *dead or alive!*"

The words were his last. He reeled back with a bullet in his brain and from the same, to Jake, unknown hand, and his fall threw his followers into confusion.

They were about to turn and flee when a heavy form shot past them.

"Foller me, ye t'arers! It is Brian Doone who is a-droppin' ye; pull him from his hole!"

The speaker was Gaffer Burke. He shot to the hole from which the flashes had come and disappeared. A confused struggle was heard, during which men whispered to themselves, but did not aspire to mix in the fray.

Then Burke appeared, dragging a weight equal to his own, and he laid the body of Brian Doone down where the light from their torches fell upon it. Badly used the king of Rockafeller had been, and many a bruise told of the fall from the cliff. From there, not knowing where his enemy was, he had had just strength enough to crawl away.

He had got into the cave and hid himself like a bear in his hole, but Burke, doing as he had said, took his trail at daybreak and had hunted him down. And now he lay dying on the bare rock.

sorry-looking "king" in that hour, as all kings are when Death stands by their side.

Oddly enough, however, he turned his face to look at Chapman and then smiled.

"I've done fur him an' I'm content," he said. "A smooth, plausible knave who led me ther first step on ther down road. We shall die together."

Jake, the Jumper, emerged from his retreat. He knew the tide had taken a final turn and felt safe while Gaffer Burke was there. Men stared to see him, but he went straight to Brian Doone.

"You know why Chapman hated me," he said. "Will you tell me the story?"

"Why not?" Doone muttered. "It's a short, sweet story, and I'll thwart Chapman in ther eend. Chapman? His real name was Alfred Earle. Twenty years ago he loved Alice Drummond, but she was ther betrothed o' Wilbur Renwood. He resolved to part them. He found an accomplice in Mademoiselle Hendrix, who loved Renwood as vainly as Earle loved Alice. They did part them by lies o' ther Evil One's sort. Tom Arnold an' I was false witnesses in ther case. Wal, they parted them, but what good did it do? None. Neither o' ther plotters profited by it. Renwood married still another party an' Alice follered suit. Earle an' mademoiselle lost on ther very ground they won."

Doone paused and looked at Chapman, otherwise Earle. The latter was conscious and listened. Doone smiled and resumed:

"Then Earle an' mademoiselle married each other. Ther woman is knowed in Slashaway Bar as Madame Lenoir. They married, but they still hated Renwood an' Alice. These two were forever separated an' a hundred miles apart, but hate still lived. Renwood had a son an' Alice a daughter. By an' by they was stole; Earle an' his wife had taken them. It was ther game ter bring 'em up ignorant an' vicious. Renwood's boy was placed with Hendrix, ther madame's brother, an' become Jumpin' Jake. Alice's daughter was placed with Tom Arnold an' become Idalah. Wal, by an odd coincidence, Renwood an' Alice died, six months ago, within a week o' each other. Thus, Chapman an' ther madame lost all chance o' presentin' ther children ter them in a way they'd be ashamed on. But they still hated ther children an' Chapman resolved that Jake should die. You know ther rest. Chapman, ain't I spoke true?"

Jake's enemy, looking at the youth, spoke one word:

"Yes!"

Then his eyes closed and he was dead.

Brian Doone smiled again and then tried to rise. To his elbow he moved, wavered, fell back and breathed his last.

The drama was near its end.

Jake, the Jumper, was fully vindicated. Arnold, shot during the robbery, had lived to tell his story—and then die—and there could be no doubt. Jake was neither rich nor of princely birth, but he had an honored name and the resolution to make a fortune for himself.

Kerrigan resigned and left the Bar, and Gaffer Burke was his successor. He still reigns, and Weasel Jim is his right-hand man.

Hendrix and Madame Lenoir fled; but, a little later, the latter died in Santa Fe. Ritter, too, met with trouble. Wounded and miserable, he went to prison to serve a term with Big Bill Benner for a companion.

The Tiger-Tamer, Tattooed Man, Living Skeleton, and Fat Woman, joined another and more prosperous circus.

Three years have passed since the scenes we have described. And they are rendered the more interesting, because, in Denver, Jake and Idalah have just been married. Honored and prosperous, we now leave them.

THE END.

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